

APOSTOLIC MEMORY LEVERAGED:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF APOSTOLIC IDENTIFICATION  
FOR PURPOSES OF THEOLOGICAL VALIDATION  
IN THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES OF THE CHURCH

by

D. WILLIAM SPRINGER

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Master of Theological Studies, Church History Stream

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

.....  
Dr. Bruce Guenther, Ph.D.; Thesis Supervisor

.....  
Dr. Archie Spencer, Th.D.; Second Reader

.....  
Dr. Craig Allert, Ph.D.; External Examiner

TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY

30 April 2014

© D. William Springer

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines apostolic memory and the manner in which these memories were leveraged in the early church. Chapter One provides a summary of the apostolic portrait in the New Testament and charts all references to the twelve among the apostolic fathers, through to Justin and Hegesippus. These writers reveal a view of the apostles distinguished primarily for their honoured role as Christ's messengers. Chapter Two demonstrates how Irenaeus utilized apostolic memory in such a way that led to an all-encompassing apostolic identity for the church. This development is compared with Tertullian's ideas, and the comparison reveals a marked difference in emphasis and strategy. In contrast to Irenaeus, Tertullian minimized apostolic referencing and identification, and instead utilized language more dependent on Christocentric identity. These differences are explained in Chapter Three, which argues that the key point of differentiation was the writers' perspectives on the apostles' empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

Dedicated to my beloved wife Maxine,  
with thanks for a decade of patience.

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE. APOSTOLIC HISTORY	
The Apostolic Ministry in the New Testament	6
Portrait of the Apostle after the New Testament	14
Post-Apostolic Fathers: Justin and Hegesippus	27
CHAPTER TWO. APOSTOLIC IDENTITY	
The Heresiologists Embrace the List	37
Irenaeus and Apostolic Identity	41
Tertullian's Refined Apostolicity	49
CHAPTER THREE. ANALYSIS OF TERTULLIAN'S DEPARTURE	
Apostolic Empowerment: The Relationship of the Spirit to the Apostles	59
Irenaeus' Empowered Authorities	60
Tertullian's Empowered Messengers	65
The Relationship of Apostolic Memory to the Formation of an Apostolic Identity	72
CONCLUSION	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY	76

## INTRODUCTION

The *Creed of Nicaea* (325 CE) is comprised of seven articles and concludes with a warning that any who opposed the council's decisions and doctrinal formulations were to be punished with anathematization by the "catholic and apostolic church." At the next ecumenical council, the first at Constantinople (381), the creed was slightly modified. The revised *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* dropped the concluding anathemas, but incorporated the declaration and belief in the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" to be one of the twelve articles of faith.<sup>1</sup> This creedal development reveals what had become one of the key theological issues in the fourth-century church, namely a more pronounced emphasis on and leveraging of its apostolic origins and authority.

As John Burkhard points out, most Christians confess the Nicene Constantinopolitan creed "yet it is not entirely clear what claim we are making about the church when we say it is apostolic."<sup>2</sup> In the *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, Ola Tjorhom states that "'Apostolicity' denotes the continuity of the whole church with the apostles' witness to Christ."<sup>3</sup> While all branches of Christianity embrace the apostles as the connecting link between Christ and the church, two points of disagreement between those branches emerge regarding apostolicity. The first concerns the manner in which the continuity was preserved, obtained, passed on, and how an apostolic identity was subsequently recognized. The second point questions the degree of importance that continuity with the apostles might have for the post-apostolic church. Roman Catholic

---

<sup>1</sup> For a study of the use of "apostolicity" in the creeds, see Jared Wicks, "Ecclesial Apostolicity Confessed in the Creed," *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 150-64.

<sup>2</sup> John J. Burkhard, *Apostolicity Then and Now: An Ecumenical Church in a Postmodern World* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Ola Tjorhom, "Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 64-65.

scholar Yves Congar highlights these tensions, noting that, “The tradition of the church ... is always considered as having its source with the apostles.” And, “to state that the source of what the church hands on is apostolic is to say that it is heavenly and divine.”<sup>4</sup> The degree to which the relationship of the apostles to the divine is emphasized directly affects the formulation of and emphasis on apostolicity.

This thesis examines the earliest of the apostolic memories, charting the references to the twelve<sup>5</sup> among the earliest Christian writers. The study begins with a brief summary of the New Testament portrait of the apostolic ministry, but the primary area of interest is the references to the apostles in the writings of the second century. All citations of the apostles and references to the “apostolic” are examined from the time of the apostolic fathers until the two formative documents on early apostolicity: Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* (ca. 180) and Tertullian’s *The Prescription Against Heretics* (ca. 200).

This thesis will demonstrate the second-century church’s development of thought and varied utilization of apostolic memory. Apostolicity was not an expression used in the first generations of the church, nor were there shifts in the basic understanding of what the apostles’ historical role had been. Indeed, the central place of the church’s apostolic origin and authority is presupposed by the fathers of the second century. The developments explored in this study relate to the variations in emphasis and interpretation of what it meant for the church to be in continuity with the apostles, and the degree to which these emphases were leveraged by the individual fathers. From the New Testament through to Irenaeus, references to the apostles, and the leveraging of their memory and

---

<sup>4</sup> Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay*, translated [from the French] by Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 24, 25.

<sup>5</sup> I will reference “the twelve” as an interchangeable term for “apostles,” recognizing that at one time there were only eleven, and then with Paul, there were thirteen.

authority, follows a generally upward progression; that is to say, they are mentioned more frequently as time passes. This progression follows a basic trajectory: it moves from historical narrative, to emerging, but varied memory-leveraging, to an all-encompassing identity for the church and all its beliefs and practices. This ascending trend of apostolic referencing takes a different turn in Tertullian. Though the presupposition of apostolic authority remains solidly intact, the North African writer's apologetic strategy departs somewhat from Irenaeus. His references to the twelve are reduced; he does not champion the same all-encompassing apostolic identity as put forth by Irenaeus, but instead puts forward a revised, more explicitly Christo-centric identification for the church and its faith and practices.

Chapter One outlines the earliest portrait of the apostles and their responsibilities. In the New Testament, the apostles were central characters. They were nearly always either a key part of the narrative, or the ones authoring the document. The mention and memory of the twelve focussed on their part in the story and their role in the recording and passing on of Jesus' teaching. The nature of these early apostolic memories are primarily historical in nature; the references contribute to the narrative itself, rather than attempt to leverage continuity or identification as becomes the case later in the second century. Among the apostolic fathers and early apologists, references to the twelve generally followed the pattern seen in the New Testament. The apostles continued to be mentioned most often as they related to their role in the story, that being their intermediary role in the transmission of the gospel. Though the importance of that role remained undisputed, other issues related to apostolic memory prove more difficult to generalize. Sometimes the twelve were revered; frequently they were not mentioned at

all. It is with Irenaeus where apostolic history and memory transitioned to a more pronounced apostolic identity for the Church. This was a development that not only looked back at the roles and contributions of the apostles, but also emphasized the apostolic character of the church with greater intentionality. This emphasis amplified as essential, the apostolicity of the Christian institution, tradition, and leaders in a way that had not previously been articulated.

Chapter Two focuses on the emergence of apostolic identity, with specific attention given to the thought of Irenaeus and Tertullian. The ideas and language in *Against Heresies* are the defining contribution to second-century apostolicity. Indeed, Irenaeus' work is primary, both in volume, but especially in influence. The scope of this study will not be extended beyond the second century. As a result, the chapter is principally concerned with examining Tertullian's reception and adaption of Irenaeus' apostolic emphases. I show that *The Prescription Against Heretics* demonstrates a significantly reduced leveraging of the apostolic memory, and a more subdued, nuanced identification of the Church as apostolic.

Moreover, in Chapter Three, Tertullian's departure from Irenaeus is traced back to an underlying theological issue, a point of distinction that emerged out of differing perspectives on the original apostolic ministry. At issue is the difference in interpretation concerning the nature of the divine empowerment of the twelve apostles for the fulfilling of their ministry.

The principle sources utilized for this thesis are the writings of the second-century church fathers up to Tertullian. Secondary literature is, for the most part, limited to studies of closely related subject matter; studies centered on early church tradition,



episcopal succession, heresiology, the formation of the New Testament canon, and the rule of faith. Research on the development of the church's apostolic memories – and the manner in which those memories were leveraged – is a neglected field. I therefore consider the subject matter of this thesis a study of some value, particularly as it relates to Tertullian's reception and adaption of Irenaeus' ideas.

The implications of this research have potential benefit both for early church studies and for today's evangelical church. Recognition of the evolution of apostolic memory provides insight into the theological developments of the third and fourth-century church, particularly as it occurred in the western part of the Roman empire. The twenty-first century church shares some of the challenges faced by the early church, challenges that contributed to the emergence of apostolicity as a key theological concept. Tertullian's measured approach to that issue could prove beneficial to contemporary evangelical Protestantism, particularly in response to the recent attempts to question the legitimacy and historicity of evangelical Protestant theology.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Note for example the recent works that presented alternative apostolic teachings. See the numerous works of Bart Ehrman at the scholarly level, or the recent novels of Dan Brown at the popular. See Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), and Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

## CHAPTER ONE: APOSTOLIC HISTORY

To speak of the apostolic is to reference a connection or continuity with Jesus' apostles. This first chapter therefore begins with a brief overview of the biblical presentation of the apostle. This includes a summary both of what Jesus taught the twelve about their role, and how the rest of the New Testament reflected on them and their ministry. Such reflections extend into the next generation, as both the apostolic fathers and early apologists are examined for their perspective on, and allusions to, the apostolic ministry. The aim of this chapter is to provide a clear picture of how continuity with the twelve was understood prior to Irenaeus. The portrait that emerges is one that sees the church's apostolic memory primarily concerned with historical narrative. The key issues of continuity are concerned with what the apostles did, that is, the role they played in God's divine plan. At this stage of history, the presupposed acceptance of the apostles teaching and authority had not yet translated to a self-described apostolic identity.

### The Apostolic Ministry: The New Testament Witness

#### *Jesus' Pre-Crucifixion Teaching Concerning His Disciples' Ministry*

The New Testament gospels record few examples of Jesus teaching the twelve specifics about how to be apostles. There are also very few details provided them concerning their future roles and responsibilities. His initial invitation was vague, "I will make you fishers of men,"<sup>7</sup> and his instructions remained largely undeveloped throughout his time with them. Their "commissioning" as apostles legitimized their anointing and authority, but added little instruction beyond what they had already observed from Jesus'

---

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17 NASB. This summoning of the first disciples is only briefly described, but the seriousness of the invitation is apparent. They likely did not understand fully the nature of this calling, but they nevertheless responded.

own ministry. Mark records that “He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons.” (Mark 3:14f) Each of the synoptic gospels records this commissioning of the twelve but provides little else in the way of apostolic ministerial instruction. When Jesus sent them out two-by-two he reminded them of their roles as preachers and healers, yet he did not elaborate on what that meant.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Jesus had more to say about where not to go and what not to take than what practical steps his novice teachers should take to fulfill their mandates.<sup>9</sup>

The Gospel of John repeats none of the incidents included in the synoptic gospels. In fact, John is unique among the gospels in that the term “apostle” does not appear a single time. The favoured expression is the more generic “his disciples.” This is used interchangeably for both the apostles as well as the larger group of followers. There are four solitary references to “the twelve,” but these prove unhelpful to the discussion of apostolicity.<sup>10</sup> Rather than provide any insight into the apostles’ unique ministry, the texts reveal a rather dubious usage of the term; it is used in two instances that highlight weakness of faith among the group, followed by words of rebuke from Jesus.

---

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 10:1-14; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6. Luke provides the additional account of the sending of the seventy-two, but again there is little specificity about the nature of the apostolic calling. See Luke 10:1-12.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew and Luke also include mention of their heavenly role of judging Israel’s tribes, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28, and Luke 22:28ff) Though the statement further reveals the importance of their roles it again fails to provide practical counsel for present and near-future responsibilities.

<sup>10</sup> John’s four instances of using “The twelve” occur in two places: 1) “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the twelve. . . . Then Jesus replied, “Have I not chosen you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the twelve, was later to betray him.)” John 6:67, 70ff. 2) “Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.” John 20:24f.

The four gospels reveal that during his own ministry, Jesus' pedagogical method relied primarily on modelling the new kingdom work while providing his pupils with only basic supplementary instruction.<sup>11</sup> Prior to his crucifixion, the apostolic ministry was shaped by observing what Jesus himself did and by hearing from him that they too would preach and heal.

*The Gospel of John's "Counsellor" Promises*

The testimony of John's Gospel concerning the tasks of an apostle is scant, yet it provides great insights as to their future empowerment. Though not explicitly stated, the context of chapters thirteen through seventeen were words of promise for the apostles. Here Jesus told them that despite his departure they would continue with what he had been doing. In fact, Jesus promises they would do even "greater things" (14:12).

Greater things were possible, Jesus explained, because he would send the "counsellor" to assist them. Jesus revealed that the ministry of the Holy Spirit had a twofold purpose: on the one hand, the counsellor would come to teach and "remind them" of what they had been previously taught by Jesus (14:25f). The Spirit was to "guide [them] into all truth," revealing the will and glory of the Father (16:13f); on the other hand, the Counsellor had a ministry independent of the apostles. The Spirit itself was described as one who testified to the truth (15:26) and engages in a ministry of conviction: "he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment..." (16:8). These two roles demonstrate that the Spirit's role is predominantly

---

<sup>11</sup> It is here assumed that the New Testament provides a sufficiently reliable glimpse into Jesus' training of his disciples. Among the more revealing texts related to this is from John 16. Here, in the last days of Jesus' time with the disciples, do they admit that they have not understood much of what he had been teaching them. "... now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God" (John 16:29f.).

instructional, both for the apostles and for any who follow. Though these verses emphasized the forthcoming Spirit, Jesus helped his apprentices understand how they would move forward without him. They could continue with God's work because God's spirit was to be their companion and guide.

#### *Post-Resurrection Instructions*

As with John's emphasis on the Spirit, all four gospels' post-resurrection narratives provided more direction for the emerging apostolic ministry. Each of the four contains some form of the explanatory "Great Commission" as found in The Gospel of Matthew. In this Gospel, Jesus uttered the clearest words of instruction regarding what was expected from the apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."<sup>12</sup> They had previously been told to preach and heal, with no particular expectations given regarding their success.<sup>13</sup> Now, however, Jesus sent them again and declared that they were to do more than just teach; the task was to multiply themselves throughout the entire earth. The apostolic charge required taking leadership over the continued expansion of Jesus' work.

---

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 28:18ff. See also Mark 16:15, Luke 24:48, John 20:21. Matthew's version is the lengthiest of the group and the other three do not share the emphasis on baptism or individual training for obedience. The Lucan reference is perhaps a dubious inclusion as it mentions only that they are witnesses. It is in Acts 1:8 that he (Luke) provides what is more properly analogous to the other passages.

<sup>13</sup> As mentioned above, when the twelve, and later, the seventy-two, were sent they were promised only an anointing of authority. The only other assurances related to the obstacles to be faced: that they would potentially be unwelcomed, unwanted, betrayed, and persecuted. See Matthew 10:1-23. Cf. Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-12.

### *The Acts of the Apostles*

It could be argued that Jesus' clearest word of command concerning the apostles' future came when he ordered them to do nothing. In the opening paragraph of *The Acts of the Apostles*, the group is instructed to go to the city and sit idle until they received "what the Father had promised," that is, the gift of being "baptized with the Holy Spirit."<sup>14</sup> The arrival and activity of this aforementioned counsellor reinforced the sharpened clarity to the apostles' ministry; the arrival of the Spirit supernaturally enabled the group to be able to speak and teach in different languages.

The initial descent of the Spirit is described in a visually dramatic way (tongues of fire and a mighty wind), but the primary focus was upon the apostles themselves. Rather than elaborate upon the remarkable spiritual manifestation, the narrative's focal point was fixed upon the twelve's empowered behaviour. *Acts* focusses on the astonished people who suddenly understood the new preaching in their own mother tongue.<sup>15</sup> This account climaxed with a powerful speech from the newly emboldened Peter and set the tone for future episodes. The immediate aftermath of the Spirit's reception was a newfound zeal and opportunity for preaching.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, throughout the rest of *Acts* specific references to

---

<sup>14</sup> Acts 1:4ff. "Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

<sup>15</sup> Acts 2:2. While the description of the Spirit falling "like tongues as of fire" resting on "each of them" with an accompanying "violent rushing wind" would seem to be a focal point of the narrative, its prominence in the larger story is not significant. Throughout the rest of *Acts* an observable presence of the Holy Spirit is often described as being the identifying mark of faith but with no further mention of violent winds or fiery tongues.

<sup>16</sup> See Peter's three bold, Spirit-filled messages in the chapters immediately following Pentecost. Acts 2:14-41, 3:12-26, 4:8-12.

a Spirit-filled apostle are most commonly associated with evangelistic sermons or speeches.<sup>17</sup>

While Acts describes other areas of involvement by the Spirit, its most frequently cited purpose is for assisting them with preaching. The apostles' empowerment was assumed to be at work in other ways, particularly through miracles, but the dominant tendency in Acts is to mention the Spirit in concurrence with their speaking ministries.<sup>18</sup> This emphasis persists throughout the book, even when the twelve hand off their administrative duties in chapter six. There their purpose is clear; they must devote themselves to the "word and to prayer." This is the apostolic ministry.

#### *Apostolic Reputation after Pentecost*

It is a difficult task to formulate a clear picture of the apostles in the post-Pentecost, New Testament church. There are several reasons for this. First, there are not many apostolic references with which to work. Apart from Peter and occasionally John, there are virtually no references to any of the others originally appointed by Jesus. In the early part of Acts, there are a few episodes that referenced the teaching or miracles of the collective group. These diminished, however, as the narrative turned to Paul.

Second, the membership of the apostolic office evolved. In the beginning, there were those who had been chosen by Jesus. With the departure of Judas Iscariot, the remaining eleven added a new twelfth member. This process informs their initial qualifications for membership, with Peter stating, "it is necessary to choose one of the

---

<sup>17</sup> See Acts 4:8, 4:31, 7:55, 13:9.

<sup>18</sup> Notice in Acts 4:29ff the persecuted apostles asking for themselves only the boldness for speaking and the request that "*He work powerfully*" through signs and wonders. It is also significant to note that when describing the various miracles there is rarely specific mention of the Spirit's presence (5:12-16). See in particular Paul's resurrecting of Eutychus (20:7-12).

men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:21f). Though there were at least two qualified individuals, the fact that only one was selected suggests the initial belief that the apostolic circle closed at twelve.

Matters changed, however, with Paul's arrival. His conversion and calling were not anticipated by the nascent church, and his authority and legitimacy as an apostle had to be answered throughout his life.<sup>19</sup> His legitimization as an apostle altered the previously closed apostolic circle. In fact, later in Acts, Paul and Barnabas both are referred to as apostles (Acts 14:14), while Paul in his letters implied the circle had widened even further.<sup>20</sup>

A third reason why it is difficult to capture a precise understanding of the apostolic office lies in the fact that the influence of the original twelve diminished over time. This is evident not only by the substantial decrease in references to the twelve, but also in the emergence of others in their place. Paul's arrival is one example of this, but there was also a group of other "elders" who began to appear in positions of governance and oversight.<sup>21</sup> No longer are Jesus' original leaders the only authorities. The close association of these elders' roles with the roles of the twelve serves to obscure any simple, generalizing parameters of understanding for the apostolic office. The emergence

---

<sup>19</sup> See Galatians 1, 1 Corinthians 9.

<sup>20</sup> "Greet Andronicus and Junias ... They are outstanding among the apostles" (Romans 16:7). He also reports on the emergence of false apostles in 2 Corinthians 11:13. Revelation 2:2 confirms the reality of pseudo-apostles in the church.

<sup>21</sup> These Elders appear for the first time in chapter 11 (v.30). Their most prominent role comes during the circumcision controversy from chapter 15. Alongside the apostles they oversee the debate and have their names included as the authorities behind the official letter that was to be circulated among the churches (15:23-29).



of additional authorities and influencers in the early church would be expected, but insight into the apostolic office is confused by a lack of information describing what the apostles' themselves were doing in the meantime. It may be that the twelve settled into the simple ministry of word and prayer, or perhaps the legends are true and they had indeed scattered around the world.<sup>22</sup> Regardless, it is difficult to construct an early apostolicity when the apostles themselves were fading to the background.

Paul's questionable opinion of the twelve presents the fourth and final reason the portrait of the apostles is unclear. Though subtle, his dealings with and references to the twelve are not always complimentary. In his letter to the Galatians he recounted his rebuke of Peter. Paul forthrightly declared that the apostle was "in the wrong," engaged in "hypocrisy," not "acting in line with the truth of the gospel," and it resulted in leading others "astray" (Gal. 2:11-14). This incident is significant if for no other reason than that it is a less than complimentary portrait given of a post-Pentecost apostle. Combined with his evocative comment that James, Peter, and John would "seem to be" the pillars of the Jerusalem church, it is clear that Paul himself is not concerned with romanticizing their reputation (Gal. 2:9).

#### *Conclusion: The Portrait of the Apostle in the New Testament*

The reader of the New Testament witnesses a significant transformation in the lives of the apostolic leaders. They began as unschooled fishermen and social outcasts and became powerful preachers, authors, and leaders of a spiritual community. Despite this, the group were not heroically romanticized in the scripture. In the gospels, they were

---

<sup>22</sup> There are, for example, the legends of Thomas' evangelization of India, or Bartholemew's of Armenia. See Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. and corrected ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 25-39.

often ignorant, brash, and ultimately; their abandonment of Jesus is well documented. Moreover, both Acts and Paul's letters provide sufficient material to suggest a waning of the twelve's influence. Though descriptions of the apostolic duties are sometimes vague, a general picture of their role does materialize. The twelve, and later Paul, were men who had been instructed and anointed by Jesus for the purpose of carrying on his work. They were not perfect men, nor would they become perfect leaders. Their most important role was to be the source of knowledge and continuity between Jesus and the emerging faith community.

### Portrait of the Apostle after the New Testament

In his essay on apostolic memory, Francois Bovon argues that "there was a natural and distinct tendency to memorialize the first Christian generation, the generation of the apostles and witnesses ..."<sup>23</sup> He suggests four historical reasons for this tendency,<sup>24</sup> and adds a fifth

... theological [reason], perhaps an all-encompassing one: as long as the Christians of antiquity tried to preserve the historicity of the revelation and the very real incarnation of their Lord, they could not avoid emphasizing the historical and human face of the communication of the gospel, that is to say, the actual value of the apostles themselves, including both their voices and their role as intermediaries.<sup>25</sup>

The very idea of apostolicity draws from and assumes a level of significance and inherent authority in the twelve. Tjorhom's previously noted definition<sup>26</sup> stressed the importance

---

<sup>23</sup> Francois Bovon, "The Apostolic Memories in Ancient Christianity," in *Studies in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1.

<sup>24</sup> His four reasons: 1.) To create an "ethical model" for the church; 2.) "To follow the command of love and develop the Christian notion of communion: to love is to remember;" 3.) For the defense "of truth and the preservation of holy doctrine;" 4.) "The authority of Christian ministry, the apostolic origin of the most important Episcopal seats." Bovon, "Memories," 1,2.

<sup>25</sup> Bovon, "Memories," 2.

<sup>26</sup> Tjorhom, "Apostolicity," 64.

of continuity with them, but Bovon pushes the idea further. He argues there was an emphasis on “the actual value of the apostles themselves.” Therefore, the manner in which they are remembered (or memorialized) will be the determining factor in defining the scope and meaning of the apostolic ideal that later became so significant in the theology of the church. Because the New Testament provides a rather indistinct portrait of the apostolic role, the writings of the early fathers are of great importance. In the section that follows, Bovon’s presupposition is put to the test against the relevant texts from the apostolic fathers. Whereas the writers and historians of the third and fourth centuries may indeed have tended towards apostolic memorialization, there is little of it in the century that preceded them.

### *Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers*

Effective historians and journalists ideally seek to have their research rooted as near the source of events as possible.<sup>27</sup> Amidst the library of Christian writings, the apostolic fathers are nearest to the New Testament writings. They are known thus because it came to be accepted that “each writing in the collection had come from an early Christian author who knew one or more of the first-century apostles... or who at least had received instruction from the disciples of the apostles.”<sup>28</sup> Though any direct connection between some of the writings and the apostles is unlikely “there is little

---

<sup>27</sup> “In order to find the truth, we have to get as close to the source as possible. The farther we get from the source, the more likely it is that the truth has been twisted through manipulation or error, a process gleefully reproduced in the child’s game of telephone.” Chris Hayes, *Twilight of the Elites: America after Meritocracy* (New York: Random House, 2012), 114.

<sup>28</sup> Clayton N. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 1996), 1. Jefford suggests the “apostolic Father” moniker may have begun with the seventeenth-century French scholar J.B. Cotelier. He “used the Latin phrase *patres aevi apostolici* (or in English translation, “fathers of the apostolic period”) as part of the title for his two-volume work on these early Christian writings.” Jefford, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.

question that the collection includes several texts that are as old as the writings of the New Testament itself.”<sup>29</sup>

It is their historical proximity that makes these early documents an invaluable source in the study of apostolicity. This section of the thesis will highlight and summarize the notable references concerning the twelve by the apostolic fathers.

### *1 Clement*

Clement of Rome’s epistle to the church at Corinth (ca.90-100)<sup>30</sup> is an invaluable source concerning the development of apostolicity. Though direct references to the apostles are relatively few, its relevancy is considerable for two reasons: its close proximity to the New Testament era, and its highly relevant subject matter.<sup>31</sup> Not only is *1 Clement* among the earliest post-apostolic literature, but its teachings and the authority it seeks to exercise also closely resemble leadership practices observed in the New Testament, particularly in the Pauline letters.<sup>32</sup>

The Corinthians’ dismissal of their ministry leaders greatly concerned the church at Rome and inspired the sending of Clement’s epistle. The dismissal was believed to be an act of “pride and sedition” by leaders of a “detestable emulation.”<sup>33</sup> Troubled by the disposal of their Corinthian counterparts, the Roman elders issued the letter in an effort to

---

<sup>29</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.

<sup>30</sup> A helpful graph illustrating the possible and probable dates for the documents is found in Jefford, *Apostolic Fathers*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Since J.B. Lightfoot, *1 Clement* has nearly always been accepted as a late first-century document. One recent work suggests its composition may have been earlier (see Thomas J. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome: On the Dating of Clement’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2008]).

<sup>32</sup> Ignatius’ epistles are also early and greatly concerned with the leadership of the church, but they are nevertheless a generation later and do not attempt to wield the kind of “apostolic” authority as is seen with *1 Clement*. Ignatius speaks on issues of authority with great force, but he does not specifically intervene in the life of another congregation as do the Roman elders in Clement’s company.

<sup>33</sup> *1 Clement* 14. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the fathers are from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*. American ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004).

rebuke the sinners and reverse the sin. That is to say, they intervened in the affairs of another congregation. This remarkable event represents the first known attempt in church history in which one group of leaders attempted to wield an influence similar to the twelve and their elders in the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> In these early days of the post-apostolic community, it is doubtful there had been significant conceptual development for a trans-congregational, centralized church leadership. It is reasonable to assume that the apostles themselves functioned as general overseers of the churches, but apart from the establishment of appointed elders there is little evidence of a strategic plan for a transition of that leadership.<sup>35</sup>

Clement's response was straightforward: the leadership change in the Corinthian church was wrong and needed quickly to be reversed. Clement's apostolic focus emerges as his letter attempted to justify this position. The rationale given, and a key theme throughout *1 Clement* lies in the divine order of God.

The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders... And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labours], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe.<sup>36</sup>

The apostles' authority is a significant part of Clement's argument, which represents an early development in the idea of episcopal succession, primitive as it may be. It is

---

<sup>34</sup> See Acts 21:17-26.

<sup>35</sup> Von Campenhausen questions the evidence of a significant apostolic leadership, stating that "the conception which, thanks to Luke, became the dominant one, namely that the twelve were the real leaders and governors of the primitive community, is untenable." Hans Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997). For a detailed study of the emergence and transition of the apostolic office see the entire second chapter.

<sup>36</sup> *Clement*, 42.

evident, however, that his central focus was not on the apostles themselves, but on the over-arching, divine economy, the “order” of God. His plea to the Corinthians did include the request to submit to those whom the apostles had appointed. This request is made not because of a concern for apostolicity, but out of a larger focus on the divine economy. His main thesis is that there is a divine plan for ecclesiastical governorship and the plan must therefore not be violated. Out of that concern emerged the order to obey those chosen by the twelve “or afterwards by other eminent men.”<sup>37</sup> After spending nearly two-thirds of the letter stressing the themes of obedience, unity, and division, Clement suddenly, and with great force, delivers his central point: “it behoves us to do all things in [their proper] order, which the Lord has commanded us to perform at stated times.”<sup>38</sup> Since the leadership of the church is an appointment of God’s ordered will, the ministers “cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry.”<sup>39</sup> Clement thus demonstrates that the content of the apostolic teaching could be trusted (since it had come direct through Christ to the elders). This historicity of the tradition did not condemn the Corinthians. Rather, their decision to break God’s plan led them into trouble.

Throughout the letter Clement demonstrated his admiration for the apostles. They were the “spiritual heroes...the noble examples...the illustrious apostles.”<sup>40</sup> They were important, for they delivered the divine message entrusted to them by Christ himself. They were without equal because of their proximity to the Lord and their appointed relationship to the church. As important as they may have been, however, the extent of their role was limited; they were ambassadors, stewards of the divine truths God

---

<sup>37</sup> *Clement*, 44.

<sup>38</sup> *Clement*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> *Clement*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> *Clement*, 5.

delivered to them through Jesus. The epistle did not waver in the belief that God himself was the locus of authority. He had ordered all things. The gospel is his.<sup>41</sup> His Spirit has inspired all those connected with his plans.<sup>42</sup> Clement admired the twelve and understood the crucial role they played. On the matter of where true authority resides, however, there could be no question that Clement placed it firmly in God's domain.

In Clement's letter to the Corinthians there was a clear model of succession for ecclesiastical authority. Clement is among the earliest of the apostolic fathers and he gave a prominent role to the apostles in the divine economy for the church. In subsequent years, however, there was a marked difference in the writings of those who followed. The rest of the apostolic fathers actually spoke very little of the original twelve. While they are mentioned on occasion, it is rarely more than a passing reference. Clement and his elders in Rome wrote an epistle that resembled an apostolic treatise, and though there was an appeal in that letter to a form of apostolicity, there is virtually none of this in the rest of the apostolic fathers.

### *The Didache*

Extant manuscripts of *The Didache* (ca. 90-115) reveal the document's full title as *The Lord's Teaching to the Heathen by the Twelve Apostles*. Typically dated in the early part of the second century, a treatise of this antiquity and with its apostolic title suggests great potential for the purposes of this study.<sup>43</sup> Though helpful with regard to what the

---

<sup>41</sup> "Content with the provision which God had made for you, and carefully attending to His words, you were inwardly filled with His doctrine,... a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit was upon you all.... The commandments and ordinances of the Lord were written upon the tablets of your hearts." *1 Clement*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> See chapters 42, 44, and 47.

<sup>43</sup> For information on the title and dating see Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Thomas O'Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010). For an alternate theory, see John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976). Robinson's position is

apostles were said to have taught, there is little within the treatise to contribute to an understanding or leveraging of the memory of the men themselves. In fact, the study of the apostolic leaders is complicated by *The Didache* in two ways. First, as already stated, the twelve are not mentioned a single time. This might be surprising not only because of the title, but more so considering the fact that issues of orthodox teaching, heresy, ecclesiastical protocol, and leadership continuity are all discussed. A century later these points of discussion would almost certainly have drawn reference to the apostles, but not so in *The Didache*. Second, though the letter does not mention the original apostles, it does reference other apostles that had been active in that era (the early second century). The command is given that, in the church: “Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord.”<sup>44</sup> The implications of this are potentially significant. With no mention of the original apostles, but an elevated reverence for a second-generation apostle, the implication is of an apostolicity of an entirely different kind. Here there was no emphasis on a historic continuity or legacy from the twelve, but instead, there was a continuation of a role, an office of authority.

One of the primary issues that caused the emergence of apostolic discussions was the questioning of tradition or the debate over true teaching. Whereas heterodox teaching was not an issue in *1 Clement*, *The Didache* stressed the critical role the teaching played in the community. Though *The Didache* commanded that one must accept an apostle as one would receive the Lord, it also admonished that “afterwards you shall examine him and know his character, for you have knowledge both of good and evil...” (12.1). The

---

that the treatise emerged very early, dating it within the apostolic generation, ca. 40-60. Were this the case it would significantly alter its relevancy for apostolic studies. This position, however, is not shared by the majority of scholars.

<sup>44</sup> *The Didache*, 11.2



evaluation of teacher, prophet and apostle is a rather straightforward matter: “by their dispositions they therefore shall be known...” (11.8). Clement referenced the apostles as the preachers of the gospel, those to whom the Lord entrusted his message. In *The Didache*, however, no such apostolic references occurred. On the contrary, the treatise is content to associate the true teaching solely with the Lord, with no connection made to the twelve whatsoever. The relevant passages include references to “the teaching of the Lord” (4.1), “the commandments of the Lord” (4.13), “the whole yoke of the Lord” (6.2), that which “the Lord commanded in his gospel” (8.2), and lastly, there is the “knowledge of the Lord” (11.2). The truth, the gospel tradition, and doctrine are seen to have emerged from and been associated completely with Christ. There are no references to the apostles, neither as authors nor as witnesses.

Because there are no references within *The Didache* to Jesus’ twelve, it is impossible to gauge accurately how they were remembered, honoured, or leveraged. The fact that second-century apostles were to be received with great dignity is not irrelevant, but insofar as the issue of apostolicity is concerned, the point is clear: the community from which *The Didache* emerged was apparently not reflecting upon these ideas. The gospel and the Christian tradition were not yet understood as apostolic. They remained fixed firmly with the Lord and were described and identified accordingly.

#### *Other Apostolic Fathers and Minor Apologists*

Among the other, individual second-century writings, most followed a pattern similar to that seen in *I Clement* and *The Didache*. The principal discussion relevant to apostolicity concerned sound doctrine and how the teaching was transmitted from Christ, through the apostles, and on to the rest of the church. It was typical that the twelve were

most notably revered for their position, their having been entrusted with the gospel by Christ.

Papias of Hierapolis (ca.60-ca.130) illustrates the reverence for those who were ministered to by Jesus. He famously celebrated the great privilege and value of hearing the “living and abiding voice” of truth, particularly among those who sat under the apostles.<sup>45</sup> He is often looked to as one who values the idea of apostolic tradition, but apart from this famous quote, the few surviving fragments of his writings reveal nothing else of consequence.

*The Shepherd of Hermes* (ca.100-150) painted a visual, prophetic picture of the blessed unity of the church. This unity was rooted in its doctrinal purity, and the apostles were one of many “stones” that square together to form a grand “tower.”<sup>46</sup> The twelve were thus given a prominent role but were not distinguished in any meaningful way. They are part of the story, but the narrative is not identified with, or centred around them.

*The Epistle of Barnabas* (ca.90-110) and Polycarp of Smyrna’s *Epistle to the Philippians* (ca.120-140) summarize the prevailing attitude: the apostles were the twelve chosen by Christ and given “authority to preach his gospel.”<sup>47</sup> By virtue of this esteemed position, the twelve were recognized for their privileged status and close proximity to both the Lord himself and the truth.<sup>48</sup> Barnabas, however, made clear the dichotomy present between the message and the messengers. The teachings themselves are “the

---

<sup>45</sup> “If, then, anyone who had attended on the elders came, I asked minutely after their sayings, - what Andrew or Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the Lord’s disciples: which things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I imagined that what was to be got from books was not so profitable to me as what came from the living and abiding voice.” *Papias*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Shepherd of Hermes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Vision 5. *Ante-Nicene fathers: The Writings of the fathers down to A.D. 325*. Volume 2.

<sup>47</sup> *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 5 and 8.

<sup>48</sup> *The Epistle Of Polycarp To The Philippians*, 3, 6, 9, 11.

doctrines of the Lord”<sup>49</sup> passed on by twelve “sinners above all sinful men.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore there is always present among the apostolic fathers a significant emphasis on obeying one’s leaders, whether they be bishops, elders, or deacons. The most important issues are doctrinal rootedness and conformity to the teachings as given by Christ himself.

The earliest apologists, Aristides (ca.125) and the author of *The Letter to Diognetus* (ca.150-ca.180), demonstrate continuity with the rest of the apostolic fathers. References to the twelve are not common and when there is mention of them, as is customary in this period, they are simply extolled for their role in the transmission of God’s revelation.<sup>51</sup>

#### *Ignatius of Antioch*

Of all the apostolic fathers, the letters from Ignatius (ca.105-115) contain the greatest number of references to the twelve. As a bishop and early adopter of the monepiscopacy one might anticipate this. Unlike many of the other writers of his generation, Ignatius did mention the roles and ongoing significance of Jesus’ leading disciples. A well-known example was his self-comparison to them: “I do not, as Peter and Paul,” he wrote, “issue commandments unto you. They were apostles of Jesus Christ, but I am the very least [of believers]...”<sup>52</sup> Not only did he elevate them far above himself, but he also interacted with the relationship between the twelve and the Christian writings (their “commandments”). Whereas *The Didache* did not actually mention the apostles,

---

<sup>49</sup> *Barnabas*, 1. See also chapter 21. The church is to remain faithful in walking in the “judgements of the Lord.”

<sup>50</sup> *Barnabas*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> The one possible exception is in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of *The Letter to Diognetus*. There is mention here of the “mysteries” given the twelve and mention also of the “apostolic tradition,” but the chapter is generally dated much later than the rest of the letter. See, Cyril J. Richardson, *Early Christian fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 205-210.

<sup>52</sup> Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans*, 4.

and while *Barnabas* referred to the Christian teaching as “His [Jesus’] gospel,”<sup>53</sup> Ignatius began to associate more closely the twelve with the emerging Christian writings. He spoke of being in unity with the “enactments of the apostles”<sup>54</sup> and refers to the establishment of the “doctrine of the Lord and apostles.”<sup>55</sup> These two statements mark the first known instances where the content of the doctrinal tradition was branded with more of an apostolic label, as became customary later in the second century. The appearance of the expressions are noteworthy, but their significance is qualified by two important factors. First, the remaining Ignatian references to the twelve remain more consistent with those of the other apostolic fathers, and second, Ignatius’ reflections on apostolic legacy pale in comparison to his favoured topic of discussion, the episcopacy.

Leveraging apostolic memory was not a great concern for Ignatius. A statement from his letter to the Magnesians is representative of his customary practice of referencing the twelve: “Be subject to the bishop, and to one another, as Jesus Christ to the Father, according to the flesh, and the apostles to Christ, and to the Father, and to the Spirit; that so there may be a union both fleshly and spiritual.”<sup>56</sup> Typically, when Ignatius speaks of the apostles, he, like Clement, refers to them as one part of the divine economy. They are not singled out for their unique and authoritative role but are included in God’s larger vision. For Ignatius, that vision is dominated not by the apostles – as will be shown to be the case for Irenaeus - but by a strong emphasis on the office of the bishop.

---

<sup>53</sup> *Barnabas*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Ignatius, *Letter to the Trallians*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians*, 8. See also chapter 13 from *Magnesians*, as well as his comments in *Romans* 4:3 and *Ephesians* 3:1.

<sup>56</sup> Ignatius, *Magnesians*, 13.

One does not need to read far into his letters before discovering his foremost concern on the matters of authority and leadership. Ignatius and his writings are remarkable for their early witness and fierce dedication to an ecclesiology centered around the monepiscopacy. While his few apostolic references are not insignificant, his teachings on the role of the bishop are numerous and clear. He challenged the Magnesians, for example, to “do all things with a divine harmony, while your bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons, who are most dear to me, and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ.”<sup>57</sup> Each level of leadership was highly revered, but it is significant to note the position of the bishops in comparison to the apostles. Declared as they are to be “in the place of God” it is Ignatius and his fellow bishops atop the pinnacle of authority, and not because of any historic or sacramental connection to the twelve. Moreover, continuity with the apostles is identified for the Magnesians in the office of their local presbyters. It is significant to note that these presbyters, despite their apostolic identification, were positioned at a lower plane than the bishops.

This trend continued in the early part of his *Letter to the Philadelphians*. Ignatius here made another noteworthy statement concerning the governance of the church. He proclaimed the benefit of being in unity with the bishop, presbyters, and deacons “who have been appointed according to the mind of Jesus Christ, whom He has established in security, after His own will, and by His Holy Spirit.”<sup>58</sup> There was no mention of the apostles, their office, or their role in appointing the next generation of leaders. The point here was not that Ignatius had omitted the apostles place in the history of the church’s

---

<sup>57</sup> Ignatius, *Magnesians*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ignatius, *Letter to the Philadelphians*, prologue.

leaders; rather, it was that he did not equate his generation's governance as being firstly apostolic in character or identity. Their leaders' primary identification was rooted in their selection according to the will of Christ.

While there are several apostolic references in the letters of Ignatius, they did not bear the marks of one attempting to expand upon, or leverage their memory. John Behr rightly states that "Ignatius goes far beyond the other writers of his period in exalting the role of the apostles." However, he overstates the matter by adding: "the apostles are always placed on the eternal, universal level, along with Christ and His Father."<sup>59</sup>

Ignatius went to great lengths to champion the virtue of, and obedience necessary to, the church's leaders. I have sought to demonstrate, however, that for Ignatius, the apostles were not represented alongside the exalted positions of Christ and the Father, as Behr suggests. The apostles were to be remembered and honoured, but for Ignatius, it was the bishops that were to be exalted.

#### *Apostolic Memory in the Apostolic Fathers*

These few examples represent all significant references to the apostles in the first generation of writings following the New Testament era. There is a consistent view of the apostolic ministry that understood the twelve to have received the truth from Christ before they took his message abroad. The apostolic fathers revered the apostles as men of faith and leaders, but the references to them remained primarily in the context of history. Their name and office are leveraged for the purpose of legitimacy and continuity, but there was not yet developed the language of an apostolic identity.

---

<sup>59</sup> John Behr, *On the Apostolic Preaching / St. Irenaeus of Lyons: A Translation and Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 9.

## Post-apostolic fathers: Justin and Hegesippus

### *Introduction to Justin Martyr*

The writings of the apologist Justin (ca. 100-ca. 160) represent a significant advancement in the development of early Christian theology, and his reflections on apostolic memory are no exception. His *Dialogue with Trypho* and the *First Apology* contain numerous references to the subject.<sup>60</sup> Like those before him, Justin embraced the apostles as those entrusted to preserve and pass on the essentials of the faith. Their role was to transmit Christ's teachings<sup>61</sup> and sacred practices (baptism and Eucharist).<sup>62</sup> This mid-second century apologist expanded upon the apostolic concept in three key ways: first, he more thoughtfully interacted with the implications of the apostles as authors of scripture; second, he attributed an almost prophetic voice to the apostles as God's messengers; and third, he elaborated on the power given to them by God for their task. These three distinctive features bear closer examination.

### *The Literature of the Apostles*

Justin was not the first to interact with the New Testament writings, but he was the first to discuss seriously their authorship and the related implications.<sup>63</sup> Others, particularly Ignatius, drew heavily upon the apostolic literature, but did not thoughtfully discuss the matter of their provenance. This is not to suggest that any of the apostolic fathers envisioned the writers being any outside the apostolic circle.<sup>64</sup> On the contrary,

---

<sup>60</sup> The *Second Apology* contains no references to the twelve.

<sup>61</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 45, 49.

<sup>62</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 61 (baptism), 66 (Eucharist meal).

<sup>63</sup> The internal mention of 2 Peter to Paul notwithstanding (2 Peter 3:15). Ignatius interacted with the content of Paul's epistles but never cited them. He wrote about both scripture and apostle but never in the same context. See Behr, *Apostolic Preaching*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> As late as Tertullian was the emerging New Testament documents viewed as being entirely and identifiably apostolic. They were written by one of the twelve, by Paul, a close companion such as Luke,

this is everywhere assumed.<sup>65</sup> In his writings, Justin began to address more directly the apostles as authors, but his reflections on the subject nevertheless remained somewhat superficial. For the most part he treated their writings as little more than an extension of their preaching ministry. If preaching was the verbal repetition of the teachings of Jesus, the written word was that same message “published.”<sup>66</sup>

Functionally, the accepted Christian texts of Justin’s day were treated by him at a level of authority on par with the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>67</sup> Despite this, however, the apologist resisted using shared terms to describe these old and new texts. In the *First Apology*, the Torah and Prophets were always referred to as “writings” whereas the Christian literature was specifically referenced as the “memoirs” of the apostles, “called gospels.”<sup>68</sup> He never interchanged those terms, and most significantly, he avoided referring to either as scripture. In *The Dialogue with Trypho*, the Hebrew texts are repeatedly referenced as scripture, but Justin continued to refer to the Christian texts only as the apostolic memoirs. Whatever the reason for the choice of terms, the relevant development for this study is Justin’s interaction with the apostolic role in the formation of the authoritative Christian texts. Naming the texts as the memoirs of the apostles

---

or, according to Tertullian, by Barnabas (as author of Hebrews). See John F. Jansen, “Tertullian and the New Testament,” in *The Second Century* 2, no. 4 (1982): 191-193.

<sup>65</sup> This assumption reveals the early stage of the canonization process and the accompanying low level of critical engagement on the related issues of inspiration and scripture.

<sup>66</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 42.

<sup>67</sup> For a study of the history of the accepted Christian texts, that is, the formation of the canon, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

<sup>68</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100; See also Justin, *First Apology* 66, 67. For a discussion on Justin’s use of these terms see Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1990), 33-40; Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 112-115.



brought an elevated emphasis to their contribution; this, in turn, led to the question of how the human and divine interacted in the formation of the authoritative documents. These questions had not yet been probed in the early church, and Justin's reluctance to use a shared terminology may reveal his unwillingness to engage fully that issue.

Where Justin only began to introduce the apostolic role, there was no hesitation on his part to attribute principle influence to Christ. The emphasis on the twelve pales in comparison to Christ, certainly when the reference was to the content of scripture, but also when alluding to the true provenance of the texts. Justin made clear that the gospel, whether spoken or published, concerned "his (Jesus') teachings."<sup>69</sup> He stated that "our Jesus Christ, being crucified and dead, rose again, and having ascended to heaven, reigned; and by those things which were published in His name among all nations by the apostles, there is joy afforded to those who expect the immortality promised by Him."<sup>70</sup> The subject matter of these published works concerned Christ. Their authority rooted "in His name," and they referenced the truths that were "promised by Him."<sup>71</sup>

The so-called apostolic memoirs were recognized on par with the venerated Hebrew texts, but there is little doubt of Justin's perspective on their true character and identity. They were not firstly apostolic; they were, above all else, rooted in and predicated upon the authority of Jesus Christ himself.

---

<sup>69</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 53.

<sup>70</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 42.

<sup>71</sup> In one of the fragments extant from bishop Dionysius of Corinth he goes further still by referencing the Lord's "writings." "And these letters the apostles of the devil have filled with tares, taking away some things and adding others, for whom a woe is in store. It is not wonderful, then, if some have attempted to adulterate the Lord's writings, when they have formed designs against those which are not such." Dionysius, *Fragments from a Letter to the Roman Church*, fragment 4.

### *Divine Messengers*

If Justin revealed reluctance in referencing the Christian literature as scripture, he did not hesitate to identify the twelve in a prophetic role analogous to the Hebrew prophets. The writers before him expressed no doubt of the apostles faithfulness in preserving Christ's teachings, but Justin elaborated further. To encounter the gospel was to be exposed to the very ministry of Christ. One could be "persuaded by His teaching though the apostles."<sup>72</sup> Indeed, just as Abraham heard the very voice of God calling him to a new land, so "in like manner we having believed God's voice spoken by the apostles of Christ ..."<sup>73</sup> "Through their voice it is that all the earth has been filled with the glory and grace of God and of His Christ."<sup>74</sup> There is the emphasis on the centrality of Christ as author, but there is a sacred, prophetic honour given his disciples in this role. They are the very mouthpiece through which God himself communicates. Their ability to remain faithful in this task is clarified in Justin's third and final distinctive on this matter: the issue of empowerment.

### *Divine Empowerment*

The New Testament, as demonstrated above, provides a clear witness to the empowerment of the apostles through the descent and anointing of the Holy Spirit. Prior to Justin, the ways in which this anointing shaped the apostolic ministry had scarcely been explored. Though he did not interact with these ideas as Irenaeus and Tertullian later did, Justin began to introduce the issue. Jesus was described as the eternal Priest and

---

<sup>72</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 53.

<sup>73</sup> Justin, *Dialogue*, 119.

<sup>74</sup> Justin, *Dialogue*, 42.

the twelve “depend on the power of Christ.”<sup>75</sup> This empowerment was given to enable those who were illiterate to be able to proclaim and teach.<sup>76</sup> There is also the implication that the divine power undergirds and indeed defines the entire apostolic office:

Accordingly, after He was crucified, [he] appeared to them, and had taught them to read the prophecies in which all these things were foretold... and when they had seen Him ascending into heaven, and had believed, and had received power sent thence by Him upon them, and went to every race of men, they taught these things, and were called apostles.<sup>77</sup>

### *Summary*

Bovon had opined that it was the tendency of the early church to memorialize the apostles,<sup>78</sup> but the literature from the first half of the second century would call this into question. It is especially difficult to justify the meager references to the twelve among the apostolic fathers as apostolic memorialization. Justin, however, interacted with the apostles’ legacy more systematically than anyone before him. His understanding of their writings and elevation of them to prophet-like status reintroduced their memory and legacy into the vocabulary and theology of the church. Nevertheless, Justin, like the thinkers before him, maintained a strict Christocentrism, a perspective on authority and on the true teaching that was entirely focused upon and identified with Jesus Christ. Justin began to interact more thoughtfully with the apostolic role, but that role was entirely overshadowed by his emphasis and total identification with the Christ-contribution.

### *Introduction to Hegesippus*

Despite Justin’s important writings and the development of his thought

---

<sup>75</sup> Justin, *Dialogue*, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 39.

<sup>77</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 50.

<sup>78</sup> Bovon, “Memories,” 1.

concerning the apostles, his influence on apostolic identity may be overshadowed by the much smaller contribution of Hegesippus (ca. 110-ca. 180). At first glance this would-be historian's influence seems insignificant to this study. He was said to have travelled to, and chronicled the episcopal histories of several important churches, notably Rome and Jerusalem.<sup>79</sup> However, the surviving fragments from his writings are few, and his reflections on the apostles are virtually non-existent. In fact, it could be argued that his writings minimized and indeed even suggested a significantly diminished view of the role of the apostles, especially when compared to the role ascribed to them by Justin.

Whereas Justin began to probe the issue of apostolic authorship of the Christian literature and of apostolic empowerment, Hegesippus revealed no interest or concern in what relevance the twelve had for the second-century church. His lack of apostle-memorialization is evident in several ways. First, he did not reference the apostles or the apostolic despite interacting with closely related issues. His language suggests a definitive closing of both their era and, more significantly, of their influence. Describing the emergence of heresy, he wrote:

Up to that period the church had remained like a virgin pure and uncorrupted: for, if there were any persons who were disposed to tamper with the wholesome rule of the preaching of salvation, they still lurked in some dark place of concealment or other. But, when the sacred band of apostles had in various ways closed their lives, and that generation of men to whom it had been vouchsafed to listen to the Godlike Wisdom with their own ears had passed away, then did the confederacy of godless error take its rise through the treachery of false teachers, who, seeing that none of the apostles any longer survived, at length attempted with bare and uplifted head to oppose the preaching of the truth by preaching "knowledge" falsely so called.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 243; R.M. Grant, *Second-Century Christianity: A Collection of Fragments*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 17,18; and Patrick J. Hamell, *Handbook of Patrology* (New York: Alba House, 1968), 51.

<sup>80</sup> Hegesippus, "Concerning the Martyrdom of Symeon the Son of Clopas, Bishop of Jerusalem." In Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.32.

Using this language of the “closing” of their lives and leadership, Hegesippus provided an image of an apostolic fade. Following these brief references, there were no further allusions to the twelve or any legacy that may be leveraged from their memory. This is surprising, given his presumed chronological position between Justin and Irenaeus. The former initiated an increased level of referencing the twelve, the latter; as will be demonstrated below, increased those references dramatically. In contrast, Hegesippus made no effort to leverage any degree of apostolic authority or memory in the debate against false teaching. In fact, he drew influence from a different source altogether.

This second area of anti-apostolic memorialization concerns the comments about Jesus’ family. There is considerable emphasis in the Hegeseppian fragments discussing the great influence and importance of Jesus’ relatives. In addition to the better-known brother, James of Jerusalem, he mentioned the grandsons of Judas, another brother of the Lord. Hegesippus reported that “When they were released they became leaders of the churches, as was natural in the case of those who were at once martyrs and of the kindred of the Lord.”<sup>81</sup> This comment illustrates the absence of the apostolic-link that Irenaeus and Tertullian will later argue was so prominent among the churches and which they argued developed with organic continuity. They sought to demonstrate the natural link from the apostles to the bishops. Hegesippus spoke of the apostolic age as closed, but also of the “natural” tendency to elevate both martyrs and the kindred of the Lord to the leadership of the Church.

Hegesippus was silent on the issue of apostolicity and he elevated the relatives of

---

<sup>81</sup> Hegesippus, “Concerning the Relatives of Our Saviour.” In Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.32.

Jesus to a place of importance; it would therefore seem inappropriate to mention his fragments as having usefulness for this study. Nevertheless, the Hegesippian writings preserved by Eusebius are significant for two additional reasons: first, they signaled the growing phenomenon of the heterodox movements of the second century. This is significant because it is against the backdrop of these heresies that so deeply influenced the writings and apostolic emphases in Irenaeus and Tertullian. Secondly, Hegesippus introduced the first incarnation of episcopal succession, another prominent theme for the aforementioned heresiologists<sup>82</sup>

Hegesippus was not the first to witness the rise of the heretical movements. By his own testimony, their existence seems to have had a long history, dating back to Simon the “sorcerer” of Acts 8. Indeed, Tertullian, in his work directed against the Valentinians, indicated that Justin was the earliest to engage the heretics.<sup>83</sup> Irenaeus also referenced a lost Justinian work, *Against Marcion*, while Justin himself mentioned his own “*Treatise Against All The Heresies*.”<sup>84</sup> Both references present compelling evidence that Justin was active as an apologist against the heresies. Unfortunately these works have not survived. As a result, Hegesippus’ brief remarks represent the earliest extant warnings of the struggle against heresy that occupied the church’s early leaders. Moreover, the combination of the extensive listing of the schismatics and his contempt towards them

---

<sup>82</sup> The position of the church fathers that Hegesippus preceded Irenaeus is here assumed. Lightfoot and Streeter argue convincingly for Irenaeus’ utilization of Hegesippus’ episcopal list. See B.H. Streeter, *The Primitive Church: Studied with Special Reference to the Origins of the Christian Ministry: the Hewett Lectures*, 1928 (London: Macmillan, 1929); J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: MacMillan, 1891).

<sup>83</sup> Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians*, 5.

<sup>84</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 26. “I have a treatise against all the heresies that have existed already composed, which, if you wish to read it, I will give you.”

foreshadows the forthcoming works of Irenaeus and Tertullian.<sup>85</sup>

Where this wandering historian's influence truly emerges, however, is with his introduction of the episcopal list.

On my arrival at Rome, I drew up a list of the succession of bishops down to Anicetus, whose deacon was Eleutherus. To Anicetus succeeded Soter, and after him came Eleutherus. But in the case of every succession, and in every city, the state of affairs is in accordance with the teaching of the Law and of the Prophets and of the Lord ...<sup>86</sup>

These three sentences, brief as they are, represent Hegesippus' most significant contribution to the subject of this thesis: the introduction of the succession lists. C.H. Turner expresses it this way, "He's the first to use the verb *διαδέχεσθαι* of one bishop succeeding another (see Eus. 4.22.3) and "still more remarkable is his employment of the noun *διαδοχή* for a list of the episcopal succession."<sup>87</sup> In Hegesippus, Turner argues, one sees "practically the complete doctrine of the Successions as we get it in Irenaeus, only without the epithet 'apostolic.'"<sup>88</sup> The apostolic, episcopal succession lists become a central fixture in the apologetic works of Irenaeus and Tertullian, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Two. These lists, in turn, contributed to the greater emphasis on the apostolic, supposedly traceable, traditions and religious customs that are argued by Hippolytus,

---

<sup>85</sup> Hegesippus writes: "Therefore was the Church called a virgin, for she was not as yet corrupted by worthless teaching. Thebulis it was who, displeased because he was not made bishop, first began to corrupt her by stealth. He too was connected with the seven sects which existed among the people, like Simon, from whom come the Simoniani; and Cleobius, from whom come the Cleobiani; and Doritheus, from whom come the Dorithiani; and Gorthaeus, from whom come the Gorthaei; Masbothaeus, from whom come the Masbothaei. From these men also come the Menandrianists, and the Marcionists, and the Carpocratians, and the Valentinians, and the Basilidians, and the Saturnilians. Each of these leaders in his own private and distinct capacity brought in his own private opinion. From these have come false Christs, false prophets, false apostles-men who have split up the one Church into parts through their corrupting doctrines, uttered in disparagement of God and of His Christ ... ." Hegesippus, "Concerning his journey to Rome, and the Jewish Sects." In Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.22.

<sup>86</sup> Hegesippus, "Sects." In Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.22.

<sup>87</sup> C.H. Turner, "Apostolic Succession," in *Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry*, ed. H.B. Swete (London: Macmillan & Co. 1918): 117.

<sup>88</sup> Turner, "Apostolic Succession," 118.

Eusebius, and others throughout the third and fourth centuries.<sup>89</sup> Hegesippus' introduction of the episcopal list, embraced and expanded upon by Irenaeus, stands as a watershed moment in the developing theology of that era.<sup>90</sup>

### *Early Apostolic Memory Summarized*

This first chapter illustrates the earliest memories of the apostles. The New Testament provides the initial witness, and the presentation of the apostles and their office was not concisely portrayed. There is an incomplete, often inconsistent picture that emerges. In combination with the apostolic fathers and the early apologists, there does however emerge a common perception that had developed concerning their role and legacy. The principle way the apostles were remembered was for their historical contribution. Apostolicity, therefore, was understood as being in possession of that which came from them. The other significant observation from this era is to note that, despite the revered position of the twelve in the divine economy, references to the apostles were surprisingly few. It is with Justin that mention of them increased, but here again, memory of them was confined primarily to their role in the narrative of God's story. At this stage, the church's apostolicity, their understanding and self-awareness of apostolic continuity, had not yet found expression as an apostolic identity.

---

<sup>89</sup> See for example, Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, *The 'Unwritten' and 'Secret' Apostolic Traditions in the Theological Thought of St. Basil of Caesarea* (Edinburgh, London, Oliver & Boyd, 1965).

<sup>90</sup> Arnold Erhardt argued that Hegesippus' influence was even more significant, adding a priestly, sacerdotal dimension to the succession idea. Allen Brent discusses the issue at length and argues persuasively against the position. See Arnold Erhardt, *Apostolic Succession in the First Two Centuries of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953); and Allen Brent, "Diogenes Laertius and the Apostolic Succession," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (July 1993): 367-389.



## CHAPTER TWO: APOSTOLIC IDENTITY

This chapter explores the dramatic escalation of apostolic referencing between Irenaeus and Tertullian in the last quarter of the second century. The episcopal lists represent the point of transition where apostolicity moved from an emphasis on a continuity of history to one of identity. It was Irenaeus who first began to frame so much of his theological and ecclesiological discussion in apostolic terms. Not only did he embrace the episcopal successions as the primary source of continuity with the twelve, but he also utilized the apostolic moniker so that it became his favoured description of all things truly Christian. Tertullian embraced the historic apostolic continuity, but did not follow his predecessor's all-encompassing apostolic language and identifications. Apart from the successions lists he, like Justin before him, primarily utilized Christocentric expressions. When examined alongside Irenaeus' parallel themes, it is apparent that Tertullian sought to refine the over-arching apostolic emphases pursued by his predecessor. In this one sees a more refined apostolicity in *The Prescription Against Heretics* as compared to *Against Heresies*.

### The Heresiologists Embrace the List

Hegesippus' long list of heretics illustrated the confrontational environment of second-century Christianity. At the heart of the competing theologies were conflicting claims to a right possession and understanding of Jesus' teachings. Several generations had passed since Jesus' day and greater reflection concerning the issues of authority and historical source was required. Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225) declared that a primary key in differentiating heresy and orthodoxy was to determine first “who hold[s] the faith to which the Bible belongs, and from whom, through whom, when, and to whom was the teaching

delivered...”<sup>91</sup> Such questions provided the backdrop for an increased emphasis on apostolicity, and Hegesippus’ list took a place of central importance.

Hegesippus briefly listed the three succeeding bishops of Rome to demonstrate a convincing continuity of authorities in that church. He furthermore declared that similar lists existed in “every city” and that, most importantly, they were all found to be “in accordance with the teaching of the Law and of the Prophets and of the Lord...”<sup>92</sup> He emphasized unity, continuity, and authority. Irenaeus (ca.130–ca. 200), followed by Tertullian, added a dimension not put forth by Hegesippus: the apostolic source. *Against Heresies* (ca. 180) expresses it this way:

we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the churches...<sup>93</sup>

the successions of all the Churches... [we do this, I say,] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops...<sup>94</sup>

And from *The Prescription Against Heretics* (ca. 200):

At once, therefore, the apostles ...having obtained the promised power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles and to speak boldly, they set out through Judaea first, bearing witness to their faith in Jesus Christ and founding churches, and then out into the world, proclaiming the same doctrine of the same faith to the nations. Again they set up churches in every city, from which the other churches afterwards borrowed the transmission of the faith and the seeds of doctrine and continue to borrow them every day, in order to become churches. By this they are themselves reckoned apostolic as being the offspring of apostolic churches. Things of every kind must be classed according to their origin. These churches, then, numerous as they are, are identical with that one primitive apostolic Church from which they all come. All are primitive and all apostolic. Their common unity is proved by fellowship in communion, by the

---

<sup>91</sup> Tertullian, *The Prescription Against the Heretics*, 19. Unless otherwise noted, Greenslade’s translation will be quoted. S.L. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology* (London: SCM, 1956).

<sup>92</sup> Hegesippus, “Sects,” 4.22.

<sup>93</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.2.2.

<sup>94</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.3.2.

name of brother and the mutual pledge of hospitality-rights which are governed by no other principle than the single tradition of a common creed.<sup>95</sup>

For his part, Hegesippus had little to say about the apostles, and his surviving fragments do not suggest that he elsewhere developed a concept of apostolicity. Irenaeus and Tertullian, however, adopted the Hegeseppian episcopal list and transformed it by emphatically rooting its origins in the twelve. This adjustment had two significant consequences: first, it infused a simple, historical lineage of leaders into a more elaborate and sacrosanct structure of authority. By virtue of their new, apostolic moniker the succession lists received greater legitimacy, power, and inviolability. No longer was the bishop's authority and reputation derived only by virtue of his leadership position in a singular community or by his continuity with the bishops who preceded and perhaps appointed him. In this new apostolic scheme, the episcopal office was further strengthened by being rooted in, descended from, and chiefly identified with the Lord's apostles themselves. To be connected to the twelve was, by extension, to be in much closer contact to Christ himself.

The second consequence of anchoring the episcopal lists in the apostolic generation was an expanded utilization of the apostolic idea. A generation before, references to the twelve had been relatively few in number, even when the topics of tradition and authority were discussed. Discussion of the twelve had been concerned almost exclusively with the historic value of what they had done: the example they provided, the teaching they had passed on from Christ, and the scriptures they had authored. These memories were all rooted in the past, but the development of the apostolic successions reintroduced an emphasis on apostolic influence and identity for the present.

---

<sup>95</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 20.

*Episcopal Succession Brevity, Apostolic Boom*

There are a number of ironies with the emergence of the heresiologists' adoption of the episcopal succession list and the accompanying emphasis on apostolicity. The reality is that apart from Irenaeus and Tertullian, there is little evidence of others attempting to utilize this point to combat the heresies. R.P.C. Hanson remarks that "The practice of commending Christianity by quoting episcopal succession lists seems to have died out with Tertullian."<sup>96</sup> Whereas the argument of the bishops' lineage may have ultimately proven ineffective, the emerging emphasis on apostolic identification grew exponentially into the third and fourth centuries. One need not read far into the writings of Hippolytus, Eusebius, or Basil of Caesarea to discover that apostolicity took up a position of central importance for them in defining the church's tradition, leadership, and ministry.

The study of these developments invariably begins with Irenaeus and Tertullian and their emphasis on episcopal succession. The irony is that though this issue typically enjoys a place of prominence in studies on second-century church tradition,<sup>97</sup> the two theologians did not spend a great deal of time arguing the point. The material quoted above are the largest and most important sections of what they wrote on the subject. Von Campenhausen states the following about Irenaeus' contribution (which was more significant than Tertullian's): "It is clear that the ideas bound up with office and succession,...by and large take up very

---

<sup>96</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 159.

<sup>97</sup> Hanson's work remains a definitive guide to early Christian tradition. Flesseman Van Leer's work is also highly recommended, particularly on the topic of Irenaeus and Tertullian. See Hanson, *Tradition*, and Ellen Flesseman-van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1954).

little space in Irenaeus' writings.... Except when they are important to the struggle against the heretics, they are nowhere pursued or developed."<sup>98</sup>

Both heretic and orthodox agreed that the authentic teachings of Jesus were passed by him to someone. Most agreed that the logical place for Jesus to do this would be among his closest companions. Indeed, both heretic and orthodox alike declared their origins to be connected to the apostolic men in one way or another. In response, Irenaeus and Tertullian were among the first to expand on the definition, implications, and applications of what it meant to be apostolic in a post-apostolic age. While the two of them were united in their argument for apostolic successions from the twelve through the episcopal successors, the manner and extent to which they further applied the implications of apostolicity to their larger heresiological strategies differed. It becomes evident that Tertullian chose not to embrace his predecessor's all-encompassing apostolic vision.

### Irenaeus and Apostolic Identity

#### *The Elevation of Scripture's Apostolicity*<sup>99</sup>

One expected outcome from Irenaeus and Tertullian's emphasis on apostolicity was an increase in specific references to the writings of the twelve. Reliance upon these texts began as far back as the apostolic fathers, but the anti-heresy literature of the second century initiated an increased level of engagement. In this engagement, one significant factor seen with Irenaeus is the way that he spoke about the Christian texts.

---

<sup>98</sup> Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 172.

<sup>99</sup> It is not within the scope of this study to explore fully the use of, limits of, and understanding of scripture in the second century. I generally use the term consistent with the way it was utilized by these early writers. That is, that there was in this time a generally accepted collection of Christian texts that had been embraced as scripture, as authoritative texts for the church on par with the Hebrew scriptures. In the scope of this study, no texts have been referenced by the fathers as scripture apart from those that would later be canonized. For a more thorough discussion on this topic see Allert, *Scripture*.

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.<sup>100</sup>

Irenaeus expanded upon Justin's approach to the sacred texts in two ways. He declared that the "scriptures" which had been handed down – and he had in view here the Christian texts – were "to be the ground and pillar of our faith." Unlike Justin, Irenaeus demonstrated no reluctance in identifying Christian texts as scripture. These references are common throughout *Against Heresies*, so common, in fact, that it suggests this had become standard practice by the time of Irenaeus' writing. Regardless, this is the first departure seen from the heresiologist.

The second departure is in the systematic approach of using the scriptures. Irenaeus spends the bulk of Book III, particularly chapters six through twenty, interacting with heretical positions and carefully contrasting them with specific Christian texts. John Behr goes so far as to say that "Irenaeus is the first patristic writer to make full use of the apostolic writings as Scripture."<sup>101</sup> Von Campenhausen adds that "Irenaeus is much more of a scriptural theologian than is normally realized or admitted. Only as an extra – or rather, only under the pressure of controversy with the false teachers – does he himself in a small number of passages accept the concept of tradition..."<sup>102</sup> Irenaeus was by no means the first to draw upon the future New Testament texts,<sup>103</sup> but his systematic approach with them and

---

<sup>100</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.1.1.

<sup>101</sup> Behr, *Apostolic Preaching*, 14. Behr notes that "There are reports of earlier anti-heretical writings, such as the works written against Marcion by Justin and Theophilus of Antioch, in which, conceivably, greater emphasis could have been given to the apostolic writings, but they no longer exist." See Footnote 5 on page 14.

<sup>102</sup> Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 162.

<sup>103</sup> See Barton's summary of Stuhlhofer's research, which showed the early use of the New Testament references prior to Irenaeus. J. Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 14-36.

his emphasis on the centrality of the written word for the evaluation of the truth were significant advancements.

As significant as the appearance of Christian scripture is in *Against Heresies*, the development is not surprising. The early chapters of Book I indicate that the heretics themselves had been utilizing the Christian writings, and, according to Irenaeus, they defiled both text and interpretation: "Striving, as they do, to adapt the good words of revelation to their own wicked inventions ... they endeavour to derive proofs for their opinions by means of perverse interpretations and deceitful expositions ... And others of them, with great craftiness, adapted such parts of Scripture to their own figments, lead away captive from the truth ..."<sup>104</sup> In response, *Against Heresies* sought to set the record straight. The principle means which by the truth, the teachings of Jesus, are preserved, understood, and identified are from those scriptures that have come down from the apostles. Amongst those writings alone, were the boundary lines of orthodoxy determined. He expresses it this way:

... The only true and life-giving faith, which the Church has received from the apostles and imparted to her sons. For the Lord of all gave to His apostles the power of the Gospel, through whom also we have known the truth, that is, the doctrine of the Son of God; to whom also did the Lord declare: "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me, and Him that sent Me... We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith."<sup>105</sup>

Irenaeus' utilization of the apostolic letters is an expected development. What is more noteworthy, however, is the extent to which he emphasizes the apostolicity of those writings. There is no doubt he sees divine provenance behind the texts. The truth is rooted in

---

<sup>104</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 1.3.6.

<sup>105</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3 preface - 3.1.1. (This is an uninterrupted quote broken up by chapter division.)

the teaching of Christ,<sup>106</sup> while the twelve were “eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word.”<sup>107</sup> His position is that they “certainly did not address them in accordance with their opinion at the time but according to revealed truth.”<sup>108</sup> The scriptures are understood as divine revelation and the ideas here mirror most of what Justin had earlier introduced. Where Irenaeus moves a step further is in his association of the apostolic role with the formation of the Christian scripture. Whereas Justin insisted on calling the apostolic writings memoirs, and never scripture, the following statement from *Against Heresies* marks a clear advancement:

Since, therefore, the tradition from the apostles does thus exist in the Church, and is permanent among us, let us revert to the Scriptural proof furnished by those apostles who did also write the Gospel, in which they recorded the doctrine regarding God, pointing out that our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth...<sup>109</sup>

It would be difficult to over-exaggerate the extent to which the apostles are emphasized here. The tradition is “from the apostles;” the scripture “furnished” by them; the Gospel they did “write” and the doctrine is that “which they recorded.” The emphasis of the twelve passes far beyond their being mere messengers of Christ’s teaching. Irenaeus seeks to immerse fully every aspect of the teaching and tradition in, and identify the faith directly by, its apostolicity. This goes beyond what Justin was willing to say about the Christian texts. As was demonstrated above, Justin was willing to utilize the apostolic memoirs as being fully authoritative, but he clearly emphasized their Christocentric identity over and against the apostolic.

---

<sup>106</sup> He references Christ’s “doctrine” 3.13.2, 5.27.1; and the “Lord’s scriptures” 5.20.2.

<sup>107</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.14.2.

<sup>108</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.5.2.

<sup>109</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.5.1.



Irenaeus' elevated apostolic emphasis is made more surprising in light of a similar line of thinking employed by the heretics. Not only were they also interacting with the emerging Christian scriptures, but they too were pioneers in leveraging apostolic memory.<sup>110</sup> The apostles were used extensively by those considered heretics as they sought to justify the veracity of their positions. Similar to the security offered by the episcopal lists, so did the heretics offer a lineage of teaching tracing back to one of the apostolic leaders. The difference is that the heretics typically avoided emphasizing the collective witness of the apostolic group. Some argued the twelve did not receive full revelation<sup>111</sup> while others claimed a succession of their own through one particular apostle.<sup>112</sup> As the dissidents elevated their use of apostolic claims for their purposes, so did the orthodox leaders.

Irenaeus' strategy seems to be twofold. Firstly, he articulates the positions of the heretics and then seeks to counter their interpretations through the exposition of the apostolic texts. *Against Heresies* interacts with the deviants point for point. Secondly, he deploys an argument of succession similar to that of the heretics themselves. Irenaeus' succession seeks to demonstrate the assured legitimacy of both the process and content of the orthodox way. The process is preserved by the episcopal lists; the content determined through alignment to what was handed down from the Father, to the Son, and through the

---

<sup>110</sup> Von Campenhausen assures that "There is therefore no cause for surprise that the idea of an exactly verified tradition, confirmed by definite named witnesses, did not emerge first where men thought of themselves as 'catholic', but rather in the opposing camp. Why should an orthodox congregation... have any doubts at all that the teaching to which it was accustomed was the original truth, proclaimed by the apostles?" Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 159.

<sup>111</sup> "They tell us, however, that this knowledge has not been openly divulged, because all are not capable of receiving it, but has been mystically revealed by the Saviour through means of parables to those qualified for understanding it. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 1.3.1. See also 3.2:1-2, 3.3.1, 3.14.1; and Tertullian, *Prescription*, 23-32.

<sup>112</sup> The Cainites claimed they had received the fullness of knowledge through the traitor Judas, who alone knew the full extent of the truth. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 1.31.1.

apostles to their churches. But for each of these elements, their apostolicity is of utmost importance.

What is unique is not that the twelve played a key part in this articulation of the tradition, but the place of central prominence that Irenaeus gave them. Because the heretics were accused of innovation and illegitimacy, one might expect as little human influence as possible in Irenaeus' schema. However, in the same way the schismatics' writings attributed great influence to the apostles, so too did *Against Heresies*. The apostles were not the passive messengers as they appeared in the apostolic fathers and early apologists; for Irenaeus, the Christian scriptures were identified as thoroughly apostolic works.

#### *The Elevation of Apostolic Identity*

Irenaeus elevates the apostolic emphasis of the scriptures, an elevation unsurprising in light of the fact that the twelve did, it was assumed, author the texts. The apostolic elevation in *Against Heresies*, however, did not end with the new Christian scriptures. For Irenaeus, the emphasis on apostolicity became the expression of choice to identify and describe authentic Christianity. Scholars look back to this period and frequently use the expression of "orthodoxy,"<sup>113</sup> but for Irenaeus the preferred moniker was apostolic. This strategic emphasis was for the purpose of demonstrating as strong a connection as possible to Christ.

In *Against Heresies*, to refer to the twelve was to point back to the divine. To hear them was to hear Him. Whereas the Valentinians carried the name of their founder, Valentinus, and

---

<sup>113</sup> See James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1990); and Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

the Basilideans from Basilides, Irenaeus argued a true apostolic connection was as true a connection to Christ as could be achieved.

This does not remain only an underlying theological principle or presupposition, however. Irenaeus emphasized frequently, and with great force, the apostolic origins and character of all facets of the Christian tradition. This tendency is prominent throughout book III, particularly the first five chapters, which, with the preface, contain nearly fifty references to the apostles. In a meandering section that argues for the strength of the episcopal lists, he includes such statements as:

The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church . . . the preaching of the apostles... and their traditions... declaring the tradition which it had lately received from the apostles... the apostolical tradition of the Church... by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us.<sup>114</sup>

Indeed, whether he refers to the faith (3.Preface), the gospel (3.1.1), tradition (3.2.2, 3.1, 3.3), doctrine (3.12.5, 14.4, 15.1), or truth (3.4.1), Irenaeus made it his custom to affix apostolic identification.

#### *A Criterion for Apostolicity*

Irenaeus' references to the apostolic are more than just the overtaxed usage of a favoured adjective. *Against Heresies* reveals that apostolicity is a prescriptive idea, not a descriptive one. Irenaeus was not remarking on a particular characteristic of the faith; he is expressing a defining foundation and criterion. This is especially evident in the statements regarding the legitimacy and authenticating criteria that defines the true Christian institution. Episcopal succession had previously been examined for the manner in which it utilized a historical lineage of bishops. The Hegesepian list was expanded to be traced back to and

---

<sup>114</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.3.3.

rooted in the apostolic office for the purpose of arguing a better preserved tradition of teaching. Irenaeus leveraged this innovative argument as a useful point for debate against upstart heretics and as a central tenet and criterion for a doctrine of ecclesiology. Simply stated, in *Against Heresies*, to be a true church was to be, without exception, a church that was in direct succession to the apostles.

Irenaeus leveraged the episcopal succession idea in order to root authentic Christianity to apostolic continuity. The strength and assurance of a trustworthy, historic continuity of leadership was not the only element to Irenaeus' apostolic emphasis however. *Against Heresies* also introduced a spiritual component to the succession idea. He writes:

Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church, those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father. But [it is also incumbent] to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession ...<sup>115</sup>

Continuity with the apostles' churches was important not only for historicity sake, but also because it was there that the "gift of truth" is found. The true church is that place where "the gifts of the Lord have been placed."<sup>116</sup> These gifts, imparted by Christ to his twelve, and onwards through the successions of bishops, were the preserving and unifying source of authenticity.<sup>117</sup>

True knowledge is [that which consists in] the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by

---

<sup>115</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 4.26.2.

<sup>116</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 4.26.5.

<sup>117</sup> The gift is of such power that those who receive it cannot harm it. "Nor will any one of the rulers in the Churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these (for no one is greater than the Master); nor, on the other hand, will he who is deficient in power of expression inflict injury on the tradition. For the faith being ever one and the same, neither does one who is able at great length to discourse regarding it, make any addition to it, nor does one, who can say but little diminish it." Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 1.10.2.

which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved without any forging.<sup>118</sup>

The bishops are the apostles' "successors," those to whom the twelve did "deliver up their own place of government."<sup>119</sup> The truth cannot be found apart from the apostolic churches because to this institution alone is entrusted "all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. For she is the entrance to life ..."<sup>120</sup> For Irenaeus, the path for the truth and for orthodox faith and institution emerges from the office of the apostles. To be identified with Christ, one must be identified with the apostolic.

### *Conclusion*

*Against Heresies* presented an innovative strategy of attack against the heretical movements of its day. Irenaeus' writings were pioneering both in its systematization of its theology and in its point-by-point interaction with the heretical teachings. Even more significant, however, was the pronounced emphasis and elevation of an apostolic identity for the church. This campaign against the schismatics was one rooted firmly on the foundational idea that to be part of the true church one was required to be apostolic.

### Tertullian's Refined Apostolicity

The theological ideas of Irenaeus and Tertullian are frequently discussed together, particularly as it concerns the issues of tradition, heresy, and ecclesiology.<sup>121</sup> With the issue

---

<sup>118</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 4.33.8.

<sup>119</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.3.1.

<sup>120</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.4.1.

<sup>121</sup> It is not uncommon for Tertullian to be presented as indistinct from Irenaeus. Kelly illustrates, stating that on the matter of tradition, "Tertullian's attitude does not differ from Irenaeus' in any important respect." J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978): 39.

of apostolicity, however, *The Prescription Against Heretics* presents a revised emphasis and focus from that found in *Against Heresies*.

### *On the Use of Scripture*

One of the distinguishing features of *The Prescription* is the comment about using scripture in debate with heretics. In his typical, bombastic style, Tertullian argued, “It follows that we must not appeal to Scripture and we must not contend on ground where victory is impossible or uncertain or not certain enough.”<sup>122</sup> This contrasts sharply with Irenaeus’ strategy, which was to answer the heretics false claims, from the scripture, point by point. It is also interesting that Tertullian would make such a statement in light of the fact that his predecessor so boldly stated that the scriptures must be the “ground and pillar of the faith.”<sup>123</sup>

Tertullian’s position was not that written tradition was inferior to that which remains unwritten. Rather, he argued from chapters fifteen through nineteen that to debate scripture with heretics was simply ineffective. To do so was an exercise in futility because it would be an attempt to enter a debate where neither side can conceivably move from their entrenched positions; both could only argue the foolishness and/or perversions of the other.<sup>124</sup> His view was that the only debate worth engaging was the matter of who could rightfully and logically claim to possess the truths and traditions of Jesus. He humorously observed that

---

<sup>122</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 19.

<sup>123</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.1.1.

<sup>124</sup> “The heretics too can retort these charges upon us. Maintaining equally that the truth is with them, they are compelled to say that it is we who introduce the falsifications of Scripture and the lying interpretations.” Tertullian, *Prescription*, 18.

arguments about Scripture achieved nothing but a pain in the stomach or ache in the head.<sup>125</sup> Unlike *Against Heresies*, *The Prescription* did not interact with the heretics using scripture.

Irenaeus interacted extensively with the Christian writings for the very reason that they were apostolic. As the twelve were an extension of Christ's ministry, so for Irenaeus, were their writings an extension of the apostolic ministry and authority. In no way did Tertullian ever question the apostolic provenance or authority of what he himself would first call the New Testament writings.<sup>126</sup> However, his description of the New Testament writings demonstrates his rationale for avoiding them in debate with heretics. When Irenaeus referred to the Christian texts, he made certain that their apostolic provenance and identity was prominently emphasized. He argued the use of the scripture because they came from the apostles. When Tertullian referred to the apostles' writings, the apostolic authorship of the documents was assumed, but their defining feature was not their apostolicity. That is, the locus of their authority and usefulness to the church did not exist by virtue of their coming from the hands of the twelve. In fact, one does not find in *The Prescription* the exhaustive apostolic references that almost always accompanied Irenaeus' writings on the subject.

Despite his position on not using it, Tertullian did reference "scripture" more than two dozen times. Unlike Irenaeus, however, there was never any mention of the apostles, their role, or the supposed authority that comes by virtue of their authorship. On the four occasions<sup>127</sup> when he does specifically refer to that which the apostles wrote, he, reminiscent of Justin, did not speak of scripture, but of the apostles' "letters". In these four usages the letters' scriptural character and authority were assumed, but their authoritative position was

---

<sup>125</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 16.

<sup>126</sup> See Jansen, "Tertullian and the New Testament," 191-207.

<sup>127</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 4,19,26,36.

not as significantly emphasized as in *Against Heresies*. Tertullian avoids combining “scripture” with the “apostolic” epithet so important to Irenaeus.

#### *A Criteria for Apostolicity*

Tertullian, it has been shown, regarded the apostolic origin and episcopal succession of the bishops as defining proof for determining the authentic teachers and traditions of Christianity. Along with Irenaeus, Tertullian declared there was no true faith apart from the one true church.<sup>128</sup> While *The Prescription* distinguished itself by opting not to use scripture, it did not abandon Irenaeus’ emphasis on apostolic succession nor on the primacy of the institution. As is the case with his treatment of scripture, however, Tertullian’s interaction with apostolicity resulted in modified perspective on both emphases.

Irenaeus argued the criteria and continuity of the true institution were determined according to a direct association with an apostolic source. Scripture was utilized by Irenaeus because of its apostolicity; the strength of the one church was determined by the same principle. Tertullian revised this idea by asking how that continuity was maintained. Tertullian asked early on, “Do we test the faith by persons or persons by the faith?”<sup>129</sup> Concerning the supposed inviolability of the apostolic criterion, he reminded readers that “It was an apostle that betrayed Christ.”<sup>130</sup> While *The Prescription* argued that the best and most logical place to find the truth was among the oldest and original churches – those that were understood to be apostolic in the most organic sense of the word (those planted by one of the twelve) - Tertullian added an additional factor into the equation: the elevation of creed alongside institution. He stated:

---

<sup>128</sup> An interesting argument for Tertullian, considering his subsequent withdrawal from the established church in favour of Montanism. See Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 349, 350.

<sup>129</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 3.

<sup>130</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 3.



Consequently [the heretics] will be challenged according to this standard by those churches which, though they can produce no apostle or apostolic man as their direct founder, since they are much later foundations (churches are being founded every day), yet, because they agree in the same faith, are reckoned to be no less apostolic through their kinship in doctrine. So, when the heresies are challenged by our churches according to these two standards, let them one and all show how they regard themselves as apostolic. But they are not, and they cannot prove themselves to be what they are not. Nor can they be received into peace and communion by churches which are in any way apostolic when they are in no way apostolic on account of their disagreement in creed.<sup>131</sup>

Here is one place where Tertullian utilized the apostolic moniker with the force seen in Irenaeus. With this usage, however, the key difference between *The Prescription* and *Against Heresies* becomes clearer. Tertullian's understanding of what truly defined something as apostolic was not as exclusively focused upon the direct historic connections that were so important to Irenaeus. For him the scripture and institution were so significant because of their direct connection to the twelve themselves. They wrote the scripture and founded the churches, and based on that connection was truth verified. Tertullian used the term apostolicity for the first time here, as did Irenaeus, but did so in a way that was not nearly as concerned with that direct connection emphasized so strongly by his predecessor. Tertullian utilized Irenaeus' emphasis on succession for the purpose of arguing authenticity of origins, but he is distinguished from Irenaeus by his willingness to elevate creedal fidelity as equally important in the determination of what is authentically apostolic. His attempt to balance these themes is seen most clearly in chapter twenty:

At once, therefore, the apostles (whose name means "sent")...set out through Judaea first, bearing witness to their faith in Jesus Christ and founding churches, and then out into the world, proclaiming ... Again they set up churches in every city, from which the other churches afterwards borrowed the transmission of the faith and the seeds of doctrine and continue to borrow them every day, in order to become churches. By this they are themselves reckoned apostolic as being the offspring of apostolic churches. Things of every kind must be classed according to their origin.

---

<sup>131</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 32.

These churches, then, numerous as they are, are identical with that one primitive apostolic Church from which they all come. All are primitive and all apostolic.<sup>132</sup>

The critical factor for Tertullian was that apostolicity was much more about what Christ entrusted to the apostles, rather than on what those twelve men did themselves. It was their ability to preserve the content and teaching of Christ that was the defining factor.

#### *On the Use of The Apostolic Terminology*

Tertullian does not use the term “apostolic” in the same, all-encompassing adjectival way as Irenaeus does in *Against Heresies*. It is not that Tertullian betrays any hint of thinking the teachings of Christ had been passed on by any other. That point he made quite clear. What he seemed less willing to do was to prominently identify the heart of the faith, that is, the doctrine and message of Christ, as nothing less than fully Christocentric. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus nearly always gave a place of prominence to the importance of apostolic identity. To speak of what was truly Christian, what was accurately orthodox was, for Irenaeus, to reference it as apostolic. This practice is not embraced within *The Prescription*. Tertullian primarily referenced the apostles and “apostolic” in the context of the historic origins of the church or to the persons themselves. Whereas it was normative for Irenaeus to label all things related to the institution, tradition, and scripture as apostolic, Tertullian did not follow suit.<sup>133</sup> What he did do, however, was establish a prominent and alternative emphasis of his own.

---

<sup>132</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 20.

<sup>133</sup> Tertullian’s eighteen references to “apostolic” are found in two sections: chapters 21-22 and 32, along with a single occurrence in chapter 36. These references are always to the institution or the twelve. Two unique instances occur in chapter 22 when he refers to the “apostolic age” and the “apostolic seed.” In neither case, however, does this deviate from his aforementioned, twofold usage of the word. His references to the twelve themselves are more frequent, with more than 80 mentions of “apostles” or “disciples.” Only once, however, does his language reflect Irenaeus’ when he speaks of the “tradition of the apostles” in chapter 21.

### *Tertullian's Alternative*

*The Prescription* demonstrates Tertullian's subdued apostolicity. The North African did more than simply remove the apostles from the equation. Tertullian replaced one emphasis with another. If the over-riding theological identification in *Against Heresies* focused on the apostolic, *The Prescription* had an equally strong emphasis on a Christocentric identity and strategy against the heretics. At first glance, the difference may seem negligible. Irenaeus demonstrated that the principal reason for the apostolic emphasis was, in fact, to ground the teaching tradition as near to Christ as possible. Tertullian's departure, however, was not a subtle shift in language or presentation. Like Irenaeus, he began with the authority of the apostles:

Our authorities are the Lord's apostles, and they in turn chose to introduce nothing on their own authority. They faithfully passed on to the nations the teaching which they had received from Christ.<sup>134</sup>

Tertullian accepted Irenaeus' emphasis on the authoritative position of the apostles, but did not carry forward with the accompanying apostolic emphases. Throughout the remainder of *The Prescription* Tertullian leveraged a Christocentric language and emphasis that distinguished itself from the apostle-centric language of his predecessor. Addressing the philosophical and speculative inquiring that fostered heterodoxy, Tertullian outlines the principal message of the faith: "After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research. When we come to believe, we have no desire to believe anything else; for we begin by believing that there is nothing else which we have to believe."<sup>135</sup> For Tertullian, Christ is the content of the faith. There is a centrality and a great simplicity to the statement, but it is one that reinforces his central theme: the primacy of

---

<sup>134</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 6.

<sup>135</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 7.

Christ. It is not a unique position to argue for the centrality of Jesus Christ; the apostolic fathers and early apologists share this emphasis. *The Prescription* is unique in its language of identity. Christ is elevated and emphasized in direct contrast to the previous methods and apostolic language employed by Irenaeus.

*The Prescription* demonstrates this emphasis most clearly in the matter of the provenance of the church's beliefs. Here is where Irenaeus' language of apostolicity emphasis reached its zenith, and it is here that Tertullian's distinction becomes most apparent. His campaign was to make as clear as possible the fact that the teaching, the tradition, the gospel about Christ came, first and foremost, from Christ himself.

My first principle is this. Christ laid down one definite system of truth which the world must believe without qualification, and which we must seek precisely in order to believe it when we find it ... I undertake to establish that Christ's teaching is to be found with us.<sup>136</sup>

What you must seek is what Christ taught ...<sup>137</sup>

Our Lord Jesus Christ, whoever he is--if he will permit me to speak in this way for the moment--of whatever God he is Son, of whatever matter Man and God, whatever faith he taught, whatever reward he promised, himself declared, while he lived on earth, what he was, what he had been, how he was fulfilling his Father's will, what he was laying down as man's duty. He declared all this either openly to the people or privately to the disciples, twelve of whom he had specially attached to his person and destined to be the teachers of the nations.<sup>138</sup>

There is nothing unique or innovative in declaring Christ as the author of truth or in pointing to his teachings as the formative principles. Irenaeus would affirm this. The point is that Tertullian eliminates the apostolic language used, in favour of a more Christocentric emphasis. This is perhaps most evident when *The Prescription* introduces the Rule of Faith.

---

<sup>136</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 9.

<sup>137</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 10.

<sup>138</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 20.

The Rule, or the “Canon of Truth,” as Irenaeus referred to it, was a creedal-like affirmation used for both worship and as a test of orthodoxy.<sup>139</sup> In this era of the church, however, formal creeds had not yet been established, and so the Rule was a rather fluid idea. Both Tertullian and Irenaeus made several references to it in their writings and never did they express it the same way twice. Though the Trinitarian framework remained constant the precise wording varied, depending on the community from which it emerged. Despite the idea of a rule of faith being relatively recent to Tertullian, he applies to it the same Christocentric emphasis as seen above. After outlining the Rule, he states: “This Rule, taught (as will be proved) by Christ, allows of no questions among us, except those which heresies introduce and which makes heretics.... To know nothing against the Rule is to know everything.”<sup>140</sup> As is his practice, Tertullian attributes the Rule of Faith directly back to Christ. The idea that Jesus himself formulated something resembling a creedal-like Trinitarian statement is rather unlikely, but Tertullian’s point is clear; his campaign was to fixate fully and completely on Christ and to emphasize for the church an identity rooted in Christ alone.

Whereas Irenaeus spoke frequently of the apostolic identity for the scriptures, the gospel, and the tradition, there are no comparable statements found in *The Prescription*. Tertullian’s emphasis was to declare Jesus as the principal and solely authoritative author of truth, while the twelve were more clearly understood to be witnesses and teachers of that truth. In this, Tertullian clearly distinguishes his strategy against the heretics from that of his predecessor.

---

<sup>139</sup> See Hanson, *Tradition*, Flesseman Van Leer, *Scripture*, and, L. WM. Countryman, “Tertullian and the Regula Fidei,” *The Second Century* no.2 (Winter 1982):208-226.

<sup>140</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 13,14.

### *Theological Significance*

The development of an early-church apostolicity witnessed its most significant advancements under Irenaeus and Tertullian. Prior to *Against Heresies*, the apostles were revered primarily for their heroic deeds, honoured for their place of primacy in relationship to Christ, and utilized for the witness they gave to the Lord and his teachings. Irenaeus raised their profile by invoking the apostolic moniker with force and frequency throughout his ground-breaking treatise against the heresies. As has been shown, Tertullian embraced some, but not all, of Irenaeus' apostolic ideas. Most significantly, *The Prescription* demonstrated the pronounced tendency of replacing many of the apostolic references from *Against Heresies* with a more pointed Christocentric emphasis.

The third chapter of this thesis will examine one final point of comparison between the two heresiologists. This section will demonstrate that the difference in emphasis between the two writers can be traced to their views concerning the apostles themselves. Specifically, it will be shown that their understanding of apostolicity was directly rooted in their views on the manner in which the twelve were anointed and empowered. The key to apostolicity was the relationship between apostle and the Holy Spirit.

### CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF TERTULLIAN'S DEPARTURE

#### Apostolic Empowerment: The Relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles

It is tempting to note the differences between Irenaeus and Tertullian on the issues of church tradition, authority, and continuity and assume the primary point of departure is rooted in their particular roles, and relationship to the ecclesiastical institution. Irenaeus, the influential bishop of Lyons, was a man not only important to the established Church, but was also close to the Roman leadership. Tertullian, however, not only lacked his predecessor's credentials, but also became famous for his condemnation of Rome and for his withdrawal from the "orthodox" Church. His defection in the early third-century to the Montanist movement was seen in that day as an act of treachery and heresy in its own right. Though the writing of *The Prescription* predates his infamous departure, there might nevertheless be the temptation to point to his later actions as a clue to his earlier thinking. While the point is valid and worthy of consideration, I argue in Chapter Three that there is another, more important theological point of distinction between the two heresiologists, namely the manner in which they understand the empowerment of the original apostles by the Holy Spirit. The preservation and transmission of Christ's teaching was understood by both Irenaeus and Tertullian to have passed through the apostles. There was also agreement that the process must surely have been aided by the Holy Spirit. Though their theology of the Spirit was not yet fully developed, both affirmed the critical role it played in the apostles' ministry. Just as the two of them uniquely expressed the relationship of apostolicity to the Christian identity, so too did they express the Spirit's principal role among the twelve in distinct ways.. Irenaeus' focus was on the divine gifts received by the twelve. The principle gift of the Spirit was the gift of knowledge and understanding of the

truth itself. In *Against Heresies*, however, there is often a nearly indistinguishable quality ascribed to both the divine teaching and to the apostles themselves. Tertullian's emphasis on apostolic empowerment centers on their ability to execute the ministry entrusted to them by Jesus. Already in possession of the divine teachings from their time with Christ, the spiritual gifts enabled them to communicate the truth and remain steadfast and true to it.

### Irenaeus on the Empowered Apostles

One of the arguments employed by the heretics was to assert that Irenaeus and his sister churches were in possession of an incomplete, or corrupted doctrinal tradition. The argument was that despite direct continuity with the apostles these churches were not in possession of the complete gospel.<sup>141</sup> It was with that attack on their intellectual integrity that Irenaeus sought to establish the reliability of their source, namely, the spiritually gifted and empowered apostles. Irenaeus summarized his position at the start of Book III.

It is unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed "perfect knowledge,"<sup>142</sup> as some do even venture to say... For, after our Lord rose from the dead, [the Apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge: they departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things [sent] from God to us, and proclaiming the peace of heaven to men...<sup>143</sup>

Irenaeus reveals two critical points concerning the empowerment of the apostles by the Holy Spirit. He speaks of their perfection and of their power. These points prove crucial in his development of the larger issue of apostolicity.

---

<sup>141</sup> See Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.12.7, "Can it really be that Peter was not at that time as yet in possession of the perfect knowledge which these men discovered afterwards? [referring to his opponents] According to them, therefore, Peter was imperfect, and the rest of the apostles were imperfect..."

<sup>142</sup> Perfect knowledge translated from the latin *perfectam agnitionem*.

<sup>143</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.1.1.



## *Apostolic Perfection*

There are a few references to perfection throughout *Against Heresies*. Typically they are general in their scope, alluding to any and all genuine Christians, those who are “rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit.”<sup>144</sup> It is clear that Irenaeus had in view the New Testament picture of being declared righteous before God, but in process of transformation when he declared that the believer does now “receive a certain portion of His Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption.”<sup>145</sup> Foreshadowing what later became known as the believers’ imputed righteousness, Irenaeus affirmed that Christians are, in God’s eyes, without fault; they are perfect. Insofar as the apostles were concerned, however, perfection took on an additional and intensified meaning.

The twelve were “the truly perfect, who, after the assumption of the Lord, were perfected by the Spirit...”<sup>146</sup> The context of these remarks reveals that it was not Irenaeus’ suggestion that the twelve had been perfected in an immediate or all-encompassing spiritual sense. Rather, the discussion here, and elsewhere, specifically addresses the quality and integrity of their message. This argument was no doubt a response to the accusations that suggested they had not received the full revelation of knowledge from Christ. It was against that claim that Irenaeus argued the twelve were “above all falsehood,”<sup>147</sup> and as quoted above, to assert that they preached without perfect knowledge would be “unlawful.”

---

<sup>144</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 5:6.1. See also 3.18.2. The most detailed discussion of the Spirit’s role in the life of the believer is found in the first eleven chapters of book five.

<sup>145</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 5.8.1. The related New Testament passages include Hebrews 10:14, “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” (NKJV). Paul also spoke of desiring “the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” but added, “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on...” Philippians 3:9,12 (NASB).

<sup>146</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.12.5.

<sup>147</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.5.1.

The point throughout *Against Heresies* was to defend the credibility and authority of the apostolic message. The Holy Spirit, conferred upon the twelve by Christ, was understood to be the legitimizing factor. Although Irenaeus' teaching on perfection was meant firstly to illuminate the veracity of the orthodox teachings, he did not draw a fine point of distinction to the men themselves. He did not argue for the perfection of the message alone, but stated quite firmly they themselves were also "truly perfect." As a result, not only did the message gain credibility, but the men themselves also possessed exceptional authority.

To illustrate this authority, Irenaeus took further steps to articulate their unique role. He compared, and indeed elevated, the status of the twelve to a position analogous to the Old Testament prophets.

But if, at His advent, He sent forth His own apostles in the spirit of truth, and not in that of error, He did the very same also in the case of the prophets; for the Word of God was always the self-same.... The Lord, therefore, who has called us everywhere by the Apostles, is He who called those of old by the prophets, as appears by the words of the Lord; and although they preached to various nations, the prophets were not from one God, and the Apostles from another; but, [proceeding] from one and the same, some of them announced the Lord, others preached the Father, and others again foretold the advent of the Son of God, while yet others declared Him as already present to those who then were afar off. (4.35.2; 36.5)

That Irenaeus would be willing to associate so clearly the apostles with the prophets had significant implications. First, as has already been demonstrated, this association further establishes the infallibility of the apostolic message. The twelve were not presented as mere teachers passing on what they themselves once learned. Rather, this prophetic connection showed that they served as direct messengers, virtual conduits for God himself. As the prophets of old received divine anointing and authority to declare direct revelations of God, so with the Spirit did the twelve receive authority and a perfect word from above. They were not passive in handing on a perfect message, they, by virtue of their anointed role, were

intimately involved in the process. Irenaeus affirmed this position elsewhere in the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* when he wrote, "... for it is not a man who speaks the prophecies; but the Spirit of God, assimilating and likening Himself to the persons represented, speaks in the prophets and utters the words sometimes from Christ and sometimes from the Father."<sup>148</sup>

The second implication relates to the unique place the Old Testament scriptures, and the prophets in particular, enjoyed in the second-century church. In the *Demonstration* – a work probably aimed more to the laity than *Against Heresies* and therefore more representative of typical Christian teaching – prophets are mentioned or quoted approximately fifty times. The apostles, however, are mentioned on only a few occasions, despite the title of the document addressing the "apostolic preaching." Because the church of this era was so accustomed to hearing of the prophets as exceptional authorities, Irenaeus' elevation of the apostles to an equal status is significant. Their reception of the Spirit for a perfect knowledge establishes them as the teachers and authorities without equal. Their significance was not only in their proximity to Jesus and his teaching, but also in the exclusive, authoritative gifts given them.

#### *Apostolic Power*

*Against Heresies* roots the perfection and authority of the twelve in the "power" they received from God. Here again there is a two-fold understanding of where precisely the power rested. On the one hand, Irenaeus rooted it in the message itself, declaring, "the Lord of all gave to His apostles the power of the Gospel, through whom also we have known the

---

<sup>148</sup> Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 49:142. From J.A. Robinson, *St Irenaeus: The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. London: SPCK, 1920.

truth, that is, the doctrine of the Son of God...”<sup>149</sup> There is a power associated directly with the message, and thus in this sense the apostles possess empowerment by virtue of having been entrusted with the gift. On the other hand, there is the additional understanding of power directed more specifically at the apostolic leaders. “For, after our Lord rose from the dead, [the apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge.”<sup>150</sup> Not only is the message empowered, but they also are particularly anointed by God. Their giftedness does not refer to acts of power. That is to say, Irenaeus rarely spoke of their giftedness to preach or perform miracles; rather, their giftedness is nearly always a more generic declaration of their own profound anointing, role, and office. In III.18 Irenaeus dealt with the issue of the veracity of their teaching and specifically referred to the commissioning words of Matthew 18:19 to go to the nations and teach. Yet he does not speak here of their ability nor empowerment to do so. Instead, he speaks of God “giving to the disciples the power of regeneration into God.”<sup>151</sup> A chapter later he states that apostles, at Pentecost, received “power to admit all nations to the entrance of life, and to the opening of the new covenant.”<sup>152</sup>

### *In Summary*

Irenaeus’ writings represent some of the earliest critical reflections on the Holy Spirit. Although not fully developed, what the scattered pneumatological references reveal is the principal role Irenaeus understands the Spirit to be executing in the apostolic ministry. What is evident in these texts is that Irenaeus had a very high view of the empowered

---

<sup>149</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.pref.

<sup>150</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.1.1.

<sup>151</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.18.1.

<sup>152</sup> Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 3.18.2.

apostle. Moreover, his emphasis on apostolic perfection and power reveal a difficulty in separating the divine quality of the message from the messengers themselves. He attributed a divine, empowered quality almost equally to both.

### Tertullian's Empowered Messengers

The question of the relationship between Spirit and apostle is not easily answered from Tertullian's *Prescription*. Indeed, when his writings take on an apologetic or rhetorical purpose his teachings prove difficult to generalize. His prevailing vision was to prove victorious in whatever he argued, often at the expense of a consistency of details.<sup>153</sup> This is true on a variety of issues throughout the *Prescription*, and his pneumatology is no exception.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, as Irenaeus revealed his primary understanding of what the advent of the Spirit meant for the apostolic ministry, Tertullian also provided a basic framework.

At first glance, *The Prescription*'s treatment of the Holy Spirit seems to follow Irenaeus closely. Tertullian affirms the understanding that after Jesus' resurrection and ascension the twelve would "receive the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, who would guide them into all truth" and indeed be "taught by the Holy Spirit."<sup>155</sup> The context of this passage is

---

<sup>153</sup> Geoffrey Dunn writes, "...one becomes aware that he could and did write contradictory things in different works, and one becomes locked in a struggle to figure out what he really believes. Such difficulties are only overcome when one realizes that he wrote from a rhetorical perspective. ...in every instance Tertullian wrote in order to win arguments. He did not describe, he advocated. It was his overall position about which he was passionate; everything else was merely theater to prove the point." Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (London: Routledge, 2004), 29.

<sup>154</sup> See, for example, his infamous argument concerning the interpretation of Jesus' "seek, and you will find" teaching. In chapter eight he argued passionately that the window of opportunity to apply this text had closed. The word was exclusively for the Jews of that day. And yet he began the next chapter with the concession, "Suppose that 'Seek, and you shall find' was said to us all." He then spent five chapters outlining how to properly seek the scriptures. His primary interest was not in the accurate exposition of the "seeking" text, his sole concern was undermining the heretics, no matter the cost.

<sup>155</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 8.

part of his infamous “seek, and you will find” argument where Tertullian attempts to prohibit the speculative searching of the scriptures. His counsel is for believers to understand that “we are to be taught by the apostles without any effort of our own, as they were taught by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>156</sup> As *Against Heresies* trumpeted the perfect apostolic knowledge, so here Tertullian appears to present the same idea. As the arguments of *The Prescription* unfold, however, it becomes apparent that Tertullian was again moving in another direction.

#### *On being led to truth*

Irenaeus placed great stress on the fact that the coming of the Spirit gave knowledge to the apostles that was both perfect and prophetic in nature. By coupling this perfect knowledge so closely with the reception of the Spirit, Irenaeus left the reader with the understanding that the apostles gained wisdom that had not previously been in their possession. Thus the remark that it would be “unlawful” to suggest they preached *prior* to their divine blessing. As noted, Tertullian agreed that the Spirit was both the guide and teacher of the twelve. However, he went on to explain both what it meant to be led into truth by the Spirit and the nature of what the apostles understood before and after their empowerment. Both apologists addressed the specific heretical claims that the apostles had insufficient understanding of divine truths.<sup>157</sup> Whereas Irenaeus countered with his reception/perfection argument, Tertullian responded with the following:

---

<sup>156</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 8.

<sup>157</sup> “Sometimes they say that the apostles did not know everything. Then they change their ground and say that while the apostles indeed knew everything, they did not hand everything on to everybody. Both suggestions are the product of the same demented state of mind, and in both they are exposing Christ to blame for sending out apostles who were either inadequately instructed or not sufficiently straightforward.” Tertullian, *Prescription*, 22.

Who in his senses can believe that the men whom the Lord gave to be teachers were ignorant of anything? For he kept them in his company, taught them, and lived with them inseparably. He used to explain all difficulties to them privately, saying that they were permitted to know secrets which the people were not allowed to understand. Was anything hidden from Peter, the rock on which the Church was to be built.... Was anything hidden from John, most beloved of the Lord... What could he wish to keep from the knowledge of those to whom he showed even his own glory, and Moses and Elijah and the voice of his Father from heaven as well...?<sup>158</sup>

Here is a significant departure from Irenaeus' post-ascension, Spirit-given "perfection theory." Whereas *Against Heresies* fixed the locus of importance at the apostles' reception of the Spirit, Tertullian argued that the twelve should be trusted because of that which they had learned alongside Jesus' ministry. The fact that they had difficulties "explained to them" and were "permitted to know secrets" while he "lived with them" reveals Tertullian's favourable view of their pre-ascension knowledge. Yet, the concluding statement to the quote above introduced the tension that he had created. Attempting to illustrate further the folly of the heretics' argument, he sarcastically concluded, "So those also were ignorant to whom after the resurrection he deigned to expound all the Scriptures in the way!"<sup>159</sup> Though awkwardly expressed, his point here was to ridicule the heretics and their arguments of apostolic ignorance. Having stated as nonsense the thought that Jesus would not have adequately instructed his own disciples, he added the reminder of the post-resurrection promise, this aforementioned teaching ministry of the Spirit. His purpose was to use the two arguments as twin-strengths in the case for apostolic integrity, but there is the inevitable introduction of tension concerning this ministry of the Spirit. If they were ignorant of nothing prior to Jesus' death, what need was there for the Spirit? In the next and final paragraph of chapter twenty-two, Tertullian set out to resolve this dilemma.

---

<sup>158</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 22b.

<sup>159</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 22b.

*In the Truth Already, But Not Yet?*

To reconcile the teaching ministry of the Spirit with his argument against pre-ascension apostolic ignorance, Tertullian sought to explain the previously referenced, and seemingly contradictory, use of John 16:12-13. Anticipating this scriptural objection to his position, he conceded, “At one time, it is true, [Jesus] did say: ‘I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now.’” Jesus’ words indicate there was more to be explained to the apostles, and the next sentence, verse thirteen, ascribes that responsibility to the ministry of the Spirit. As Tertullian references both verses, however, his interpolated commentary reveals his interpretation:

At one time, it is true, [Jesus] did say: “*I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now.*” But by adding: “*When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all the truth,*” he showed that they who would [attain]<sup>160</sup> the whole truth through the Spirit of truth, as he promised, were ignorant of nothing.<sup>161</sup>

Relying on their three years with Jesus as his chief evidence against apostolic ignorance, Tertullian interacted with the scriptural theme so prominent in Irenaeus’ thinking. It might in fact seem easiest to understand the meaning of this passage from *The Prescription* as analogous to the arguments in *Against Heresies*; that is, that the apostles were not ignorant *because* the Spirit was soon to guide them. This position, however, does not correspond to the context of the rest of Tertullian’s chapter and the emphasis on a reliability of pre-ascension, apostolic understanding. Though the logical flow of this particular paragraph is rather awkward, its intended purpose is clear. The formula for his argument follows this pattern: 1) It is true, Jesus once said “x,” 2) but by adding “y,” 3) he demonstrated “z.” The formula demonstrates that the “x” in Jesus’ statement appears to be problematic. His

---

<sup>160</sup> There is a departure here from Greenslade’s translation, which renders *consicaturis* as “receive,” whereas Peter Holmes (ANF) and Peter Bindlay both translate it as “attain.”

<sup>161</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 22.



contention was that the inclusion of “y” led to the conclusion of “z” and therefore must qualify “x.” So whatever Jesus meant when he made the reference about things not being able to be said to the twelve, it must be understood, Tertullian argued, in the context that they “were ignorant of nothing.” This “ignorance” (Latin *Ingnorasse*),<sup>162</sup> like the context of the entire paragraph, points back in time, and makes clear Tertullian’s focus on the apostles’ understanding even before their reception of the Spirit.

### *Consecuturis the Key*

The question remains, however, as to what meaning Tertullian envisioned for this coming of the Spirit. If the twelve were not ignorant prior to the Spirit, then what did it mean for them to be led “into all the truth?” Tertullian provided his answer as he interpreted verse thirteen with the statement that “he showed that they *would attain* the whole truth.” While this seems to be another contradictory remark – and thus aligns with Irenaeus’ position – the key is in his choice of words for this “attainment” of the truth. Tertullian argued that verse thirteen shows that the apostles “would attain” (*consecuturis*) the whole truth and were therefore “ignorant of nothing.” This “attainment” from the Spirit is central to his thinking. As already shown, Irenaeus seemed to use this idea to suggest that the reception of the Spirit marks the arrival of the apostles’ perfect knowledge. Tertullian, however, did not use a typical word to convey the acquiring of a possession.<sup>163</sup> Rather, he used *consecuturis*, whose primary meaning includes “to attain,” but is also translated “to pursue” or “to follow after.”<sup>164</sup> These latter renderings are relevant when observing his use of the term in other contexts, most notably when referring to the Christian’s attainment of

---

<sup>162</sup> *Ingnorasse*, past perfect tense.

<sup>163</sup> An example is in Chapter 6 when he says, “They faithfully passed on to the nations the teaching which they had received from Christ.” Here the Latin word for receive is *acceptam*.

<sup>164</sup> See Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid from <http://archives.nd.edu/latgramm.htm>.

salvation. For example, when paraphrasing the Pauline statement that Christians “are being saved,”<sup>165</sup> Tertullian uniquely inserts *consecuturis* in the text as a means of explaining the dynamic process of salvation. This is similar to the way the usually literal NASB translation adds “being” saved to the verse. This is in contrast, however, to the Greek text and Vulgate, both of which do not include “being” but do place “salvation” in the present passive tense.<sup>166</sup> It is in fact a distinctive feature of Tertullian’s to use the word when speaking of the journey of salvation.<sup>167</sup> This is most likely due to the fact that for the Christian, salvation is a promise rooted in the future, yet is also a reality in the present. *Consecuturis* is a unique word that captures this two-fold dynamic. Tertullian illustrates this dynamic in his treatise *On Patience*.

... believing the resurrection of Christ we believe also in our own, for whose sake He both died and rose again. Since, then, there is certainty as to the resurrection of the dead, grief for death is needless, and impatience of grief is needless.... For why should you bear without moderation the fact that one is gone away whom you will presently follow? Besides, impatience in matters of this kind bodes ill for our hope... If, then, we grieve impatiently over such as have attained (*consecutos*) the desire of Christians, we show unwillingness ourselves to attain (*consequi*) it.<sup>168</sup>

Tertullian’s unique use of *consecuturis* to refer to salvation can be explained by the word’s flexibility of meaning, a flexibility that corresponds perfectly to the already/not yet nature of the Christian’s salvation. The promises of faith will be attained, but are presently being pursued and “followed after.” When applied to the context of Tertullian’s handling of the John 16 passage, his purposes become clearer. He sees the reception of the Spirit as confirming and preserving what Jesus himself established among his apostles. The Spirit is

---

<sup>165</sup> “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:18, NASB.

<sup>166</sup> Vulgate: verbum enim crucis pereuntibus quidem stultitia est his autem qui salvi fiunt id est nobis virtus Dei est; Greek: ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστὶν τοῖς δὲ σωζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστίν.

<sup>167</sup> See also Tertullian’s *The Apology*, 21; and *Against Marcion*, 1.19; 1.27; 5.5.

<sup>168</sup> Tertullian, *On Patience*, 9.

indeed the guide to truth, but it is not by means of previously unknown revelation. The twelve did not attain new truths; rather, the Spirit's guidance and illumination worked with that which had already been presented to them by the living Jesus himself. As death fulfills the promise of salvation for the believer, so the advent of the Spirit confirms and preserves the apostles' journey into "all truth."

*The Practical Roles of the Spirit for the Apostles and the Church*

Tertullian provides a second example of how the Spirit leads to truth and in so doing distinguishes himself yet again from Irenaeus' position. In the brief study of the relevant New Testament passages at the beginning of this thesis, it was noted that there are essentially three responsibilities for the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. Tertullian referenced the third, "independent ministry of the Spirit" theme when addressing another of the heretics' arguments. Commenting on the likelihood that the apostles and subsequent generations of "orthodox" churches might have all erred into one and the same misguided faith, Tertullian muses:

Suppose the Holy Spirit had no regard for any church, to guide it into the truth, although it was for this purpose that Christ sent him and asked him of the Father to be the teacher of the truth. Suppose the steward of God, the vicar of Christ, neglected his office, allowing the churches for a time to understand and believe other than as he himself preached through the apostles...<sup>169</sup>

Here is a clearer "purpose statement" concerning the role of the Spirit. As John spoke of the unique and independent role of the counsellor, so did Tertullian state that the Spirit has his own responsibilities, his own "office." This role, still under the rubric of the John 16 passage, does not, in fact, involve the apostles whatsoever. The Spirit's guidance is a work of preservation for the entire church, a blessing not exclusive to the twelve alone. Moreover,

---

<sup>169</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 28.

whereas *Against Heresies* emphasized the church's apostolicity as the safeguard for truth, Tertullian attributed that responsibility to the Holy Spirit.

Tertullian elaborated on the office of the Spirit in a third way. Again affirming the apostles' sufficient, pre-ascension education, he recounted Jesus' commissioning of the disciples and gave clear insight into the utility of the Spirit in their ministry. He wrote that Jesus:

himself declared, while he lived on earth, what he was, what he had been, how he was fulfilling his Father's will, what he was laying down as man's duty. He declared all this either openly to the people or privately to the disciples, twelve of whom he had specially attached to his person and destined to be the teachers of the nations.... The remaining eleven, on his return to his Father after the resurrection, he ordered to go and teach the nations, baptizing them into the Father and into the Son and into the Holy Ghost. ...having obtained the promised power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles and to speak boldly, they set out through Judaea first, bearing witness to their faith in Jesus Christ...<sup>170</sup>

This reference to the Spirit's role is unique in that it is Tertullian's clearest statement on the Spirit's purpose in relationship to the apostles. The statement is definitive in declaring that the blessing and empowerment was obtained "to work miracles and to speak boldly." Their training in the content of faith was complete and they not possessed the abilities necessary to promulgate the message. This is an emphasis missing from Irenaeus' writings.

#### The Relationship of Apostolic Memory to the Formation of an Apostolic Identity

It is the argument of this thesis that Irenaeus and Tertullian differ in their approach to the Church's apostolicity in that they do not equally emphasize or leverage apostolic memory. It is my contention that this distinction can be attributed to their understanding of the apostles empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus revealed a high theological view and

---

<sup>170</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, 20.

respect for the twelve. The typical position of the apostolic fathers had been to treat the apostles as the messengers of the divine teaching. In *Against Heresies*, however, a far more detailed and elevated role of importance emerged for the twelve. No longer mere messengers, Irenaeus' apostles were the specially anointed authorities of power and perfection. Whereas Clement of Rome pointed his readers to the divine economy of God, and whereas Ignatius of Antioch placed central importance on the bishop, Irenaeus, with his high view of the twelve, elevated them to a place of central importance for the church. His view of the empowered apostle led him to begin identifying the Christian institution and its teachings as apostolic.

Tertullian did not follow Irenaeus' practice of expressly naming and claiming authentic Christianity with the apostolic moniker. His departure in this parallels his divergent thoughts on the apostles and the nature of their empowerment. One does not see in *The Prescription* so nearly high a view of the twelve and their divine giftedness. For Tertullian, the empowerment was no less divine but was indeed more subdued. His emphasis remained rooted in their roles as messengers, their gifts given for the purpose of delivering the divine message. This more understated view of the twelve reveals why Tertullian would be less inclined to brand all things apostolic. Just as he focussed on Jesus gifting his followers to be able to spread his message; so in turn he continued to use more Christocentric language when he expressed the essentials of the faith. In this we therefore see a direct correlation between apostolic memory – how the apostles were remembered – with apostolic identity.

## CONCLUSION

There are good reasons why *Against Heresies* and *The Prescription Against Heretics* are so often paired together. Their subject matter covers the same themes, they share similar objectives, and both made significant contributions in the development of Christian theology, particularly in the defense against heresy. On the matter of the leveraging of apostolic memory, however, Irenaeus and Tertullian demonstrate markedly different strategies. Though both sought to defend the authentic gospel among the orthodox churches, the two differed when it came to utilizing the legacy and historic connection to the twelve apostles.

Irenaeus' strategy was to emphasize repeatedly the church's connection to the twelve and to declare that connection to be the predominant identity for the church. The truth was established and proved from the writings of the apostles, the legitimacy of a congregation was proved by her connection to those apostles, and the very nature and quality of her faith, tradition, and teaching was determined and described as being apostolic in character. Irenaeus' elevation of the apostles and of apostolicity was rooted in his understanding of the relationship between the twelve and Christ through the divine connection and empowerment by the Holy Spirit. They and they alone served in this prophetic role, anointed with the gift of power and perfect knowledge. Given this high view of the apostles, it is unsurprising they occupied a place of central importance in the theology of *Against Heresies*.

Tertullian accepted completely the theory of the apostolic, episcopal successions as pioneered by his predecessor. However, he steadfastly resisted expressing the church's character and identity with the all-encompassing apostolic vision pursued in *Against Heresies*. Instead, *The Prescription Against the Heretics* sought to express and define the

Christian faith and traditions with a determinedly Christocentric identity and to present a more subdued, organic apostolicity.

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate not only the distinguishing emphasis of Tertullian in comparison to Irenaeus, but also the fact that the former's subdued apostolicity was more representative of those who preceded Irenaeus. Prior to *Against Heresies*, the apostles were not frequently mentioned, and the idea of an over-arching apostolic identity of the church and its teaching were not yet part of the vocabulary of the church. This dramatically changed with Irenaeus, and it marked the beginning of a trend that became increasingly leveraged by the church. In the third and especially the fourth century, theologians from both East and West adopted the language of apostolicity. Tertullian, however, stood in a unique position in the development of this idea. Though *The Prescription* is so commonly partnered with *Against Heresies* as the early adopters of apostolicity, the reality is that Tertullian was in many ways tempering the positions put forth by his predecessor. He did not label everything with the apostolic moniker; he did not utilize scripture simply for the very fact of its connection to the apostles; he agreed with the strength and logic of an apostolic succession, but he did not argue for the ongoing apostolic legitimacy based on a church's direct connection to those apostles. On the contrary, Tertullian, much like Justin before him, elevated Jesus at every point. It was the Lord's gospel, his tradition, his teachings, his institution, and even his rule of faith. Ultimately, Tertullian's moderated apostolicity was not embraced. What motives prompted Irenaeus' version to be accepted instead, must be left for another study.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agnew, Francis, H. "The Origin of the NT Apostle-Concept: A Review of Research." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no.1 (1986): 75-96.
- Allert, Craig D. *A High View of Scripture: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Amand de Mendieta, Emmanuel. *The "Unwritten" and "Secret" Apostolic Traditions in the Theological Thought of St. Basil of Caesarea*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965.
- Barnes, T.D. *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Barton, J. *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997.
- Bauer, Walter. *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Picture of the Apostle in Early Christian Tradition." In *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, 2:35-74. Translated by Robert McLachlan Wilson. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964.
- Behr, John. *On the Apostolic Preaching / St. Irenaeus of Lyons: A Translation and Introduction*. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997.
- Bienert, Wolfgang A. "The Picture of the Apostle in Early Christian Tradition." In *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., rev. ed., edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, 2:5-27. Translated by Robert Mcachlan Wilson. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991/92.
- Bovon, François. "Apostolic Memories in Ancient Christianity." In *Studies in Early Christianity*, 1-16. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Bowman, Robert M. *Orthodoxy and Heresy: A Guide to Doctrinal Discernment*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.
- Brent, Allen. "Diogenes Laertius and the Apostolic Succession." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (July 1993): 367-389.
- Brown, H.O.J. *Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.



- Burkhard, John J. *Apostolicity Then and Now: An Ecumenical Church in a Postmodern World*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004.
- Congar, Yves. *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay*. Translated by Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough. London: Burns & Oates, 1966.
- Countryman, L. "Tertullian and the Regula Fidei." *The Second Century* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 208-226.
- Dix, Dom Gregory. "The Ministry in the Early Church." In *The Apostolic Ministry: Essays on the History and the Doctrine of Episcopacy*, edited by Kenneth E. Kirk, 183-304. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946.
- Dunn, Geoffrey D. *Tertullian*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: SCM Press, 1990.
- Ehrhardt, Arnold. *The Apostolic Succession in the First Two Centuries of the Church*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1953.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Flesseman-van Leer, Ellen. *Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church*. Assen: van Gorcum, 1954.
- Frend, W.H.C. *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Gamble, Harry Y. *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. "Athens and Jerusalem Revisited: Reason and Authority in Tertullian." *Church History* 43 (1974): 17-25.
- Grant, R.M. *Second-Century Christianity: A Collection of Fragments*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Heresy and Criticism: The Search for Authenticity in Early Christian Literature*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "From Scripture to Tradition and Back." In *Perspectives on Scripture and Tradition*, edited by Joseph F. Kelly, 32-43. Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1976.
- Greenslade, S.L. *Early Latin Theology*. London: SCM Press, 1956.
- Guerra, Anthony J. "Polemical Christianity: Tertullian's Search for Certitude." *The Second Century* 8 (1991): 109-123.

- Hamell, Patrick J. *Handbook of Patrology*. New York: Alba House, 1968.
- Hanson, R.P.C. *Tradition in the Early Church*. London: SCM, 1962.
- Hayes, Chris. *Twilight of the Elites: America after Meritocracy*. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Herron, Thomas J. *Clement and the Early Church of Rome: On the Dating of Clement's First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2008.
- Hilhorst, A., ed. *The Apostolic Age in Patristic Thought*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Hornschuh, M. "The Apostles as Bearers of the Tradition." In *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, 2:74-87. Translated by Robert McLachlan Wilson. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964.
- Hultgren, Arland J. *The Rise of Normative Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.
- Jansen, John F. "Tertullian and the New Testament." *The Second Century* 2, no. 4 (1982): 191-207.
- Jefford, Clayton N. *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996.
- Kearsley, Roy. *Tertullian's Theology of Divine Power*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998.
- Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Creeds*. London: Longman, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Early Christian Doctrines*. 5<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Koester, Helmut. *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1990.
- Lane, Anthony N.S. "Scripture, Tradition and Church: An Historical Survey." *Vox Evangelical* 9 (1975): 37-55.
- Lightfoot, J.B. *The Apostolic Fathers*. London: Macmillan, 1891.
- Lyman, Rebecca. *Early Christian Traditions*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1999.
- Mason, A.J. "Conceptions of the Church in Early Times." In *Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry*, ed. H.B. Swete, 1-56. London: Macmillan, 1918.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

- Milavec, Aaron. *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004.
- Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia*. 2nd rev. and corrected ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.
- Norris, Richard A. "Heresy and Orthodoxy in the Later Second Century." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 52, no. 1 (1998): 43-59.
- O'Loughlin, Thomas. *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Osborn, Eric. *Tertullian, The First Theologian of the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- . "Reason and the Rule of Faith in the Second Century AD." In *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams, 40-61. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Pagels, Elaine. "Irenaeus, the 'Canon of Truth,' and the Gospel of John: Making a Difference through Hermeneutics and Ritual." *Vigiliae Christianae* 56, no. 4 (2002): 339-371.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Richardson, Cyril J. *Early Christian Fathers*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952.
- Roberts, Alexander and James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. American ed. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.
- Robinson, James M. and Helmut Koester. *Trajectories through Early Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.
- Robinson, J.A. *St. Irenaeus: The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. London: SPCK, 1920.
- Robinson, John A. T. *Redating the New Testament*. London: SCM Press, 1976.
- Streeter, B. H. *The Primitive Church: Studied with Special Reference to the Origins of the Christian Ministry: The Hewett Lectures, 1928*. London: Macmillan, 1929.
- Tertullian On the Testimony of the Soul and on The "Prescription" of Heretics*. Translated into English by T. Herbert Bindley. London: SPCK, 1914.
- Thompson, John L. "Scripture, Tradition, and the Formation of Christian Culture: The Theological and Pastoral Function of the History of Interpretation." *Ex Auditu* 19 (2003): 24-27.

- Thomassen, Einar. "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Second-century Rome." *Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 3 (2004): 241-256.
- Tjorhom, Ola. "Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession." In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, edited by Daniel Patte, 64-65. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Turner, C.H. "Apostolic Succession." In *Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry*, edited by H.B. Swete, 93-214. London: Macmillan, 1918.
- Turner, H.E.W. *The Pattern of Christian Truth*. London: Mowbray, 1954.
- Von Campenhausen, Hans. *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.
- Wicks, Jared. "Ecclesial Apostolicity Confessed in the Creed." *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 150-164.
- Wilken, Robert L. "Tertullian and the Early Christian View of Tradition." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38 (1967): 221-233.
- Williams, D.H. *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Williams, Rowan. "Does It Make Sense to Speak of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy?" In *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, edited by Rowan Williams, 1-23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

*curriculum vitae*  
**D. William Springer**

---

**BIOGRAPHY**

Don lives with his wife Maxine, and their four daughters in North Vancouver. They began serving at Westlynn Baptist Church shortly after Don completed his seminary class-work, and they completed the ministry shortly before the successful defense of this thesis. Despite the nine-year delay, there remains much love and passion for study of the early church, particularly the second century. Other interests include hiking, reading, and the Vancouver Whitecaps.

---

**EDUCATION**

<i>Master of Theological Studies</i> (History)	2002 – 2004, 2012 – 2013
ACTS Seminaries of Trinity Western University (Langley, BC)	
<i>Graduate Studies</i>	2003, 2013
Regent College (Vancouver, BC)	
<i>Bachelor of Arts</i> (Biblical Studies)	1997 – 2001
Columbia Bible College (Abbotsford, BC)	

---

**EXPERIENCE**

<i>Senior Pastor</i>	July 2005 – Oct 2013
Westlynn Baptist Church (North Vancouver, BC)	
<i>Interim Pastor</i>	Jan 2005 – Jun 2005
Maple Ridge Church of the Nazarene (Maple Ridge, BC)	
<i>Research Assistant</i>	2002 – 2004
Religious Studies Department, Trinity Western University (Langley, BC)	

---

**ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS & CONFERENCES**

Mennonite Graduate Student Conference (Elkhart, IN)	Jun 2004
Presentation on the role of tradition in Tertullian's <i>Prescription</i> .	
Lectures at Trinity Western University (Langley, BC)	2003 – 2004
Lectures on early Apostolic Succession; Byzantine Christianity.	

---

**AWARDS AND HONOURS**

- Travel Bursary, Mennonite Graduate Student Conference, 2004
- Dean's list, Columbia Bible College Graduation, 2001.
- Various Bursaries & scholarships, Columbia Bible College, 1998-2000